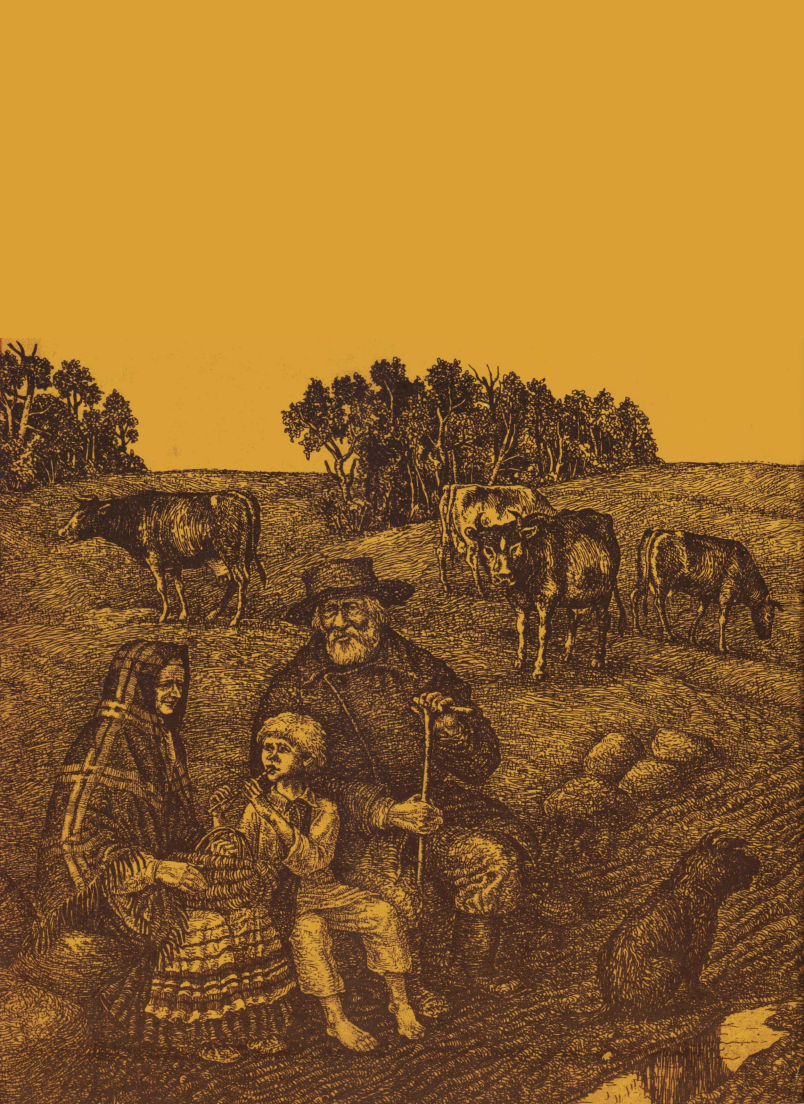


BYELORUSSIAN
FOLK
TALES







BYELORUSSIAN FOLK TALES

Translated by L. CORTES

Drawings by V. SLAWUK

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TO THE READER

This book, addressed to grown-ups, is meant to acquaint them with the Byelorussian folklore — the source of many later fairy-tales. The first eight tales are fables and, as such, have mostly animals for their main characters. As is usual in this genre of short story, they embody human virtues and vices.

The choice of the remaining twenty-six tales has been dictated by the main themes ruling the national Byelorussian folklore — the struggle of Good against a seemingly overpowering force of Evil, and the importance of the place occupied by Work and Comradeship in the final achievement of the victory of Good.

Thus, we witness the struggle of the poverty-stricken peasant, or, as he is called, muzhik, against the oppression of the landlord, the priest, and the tzar (or king, as the case may be). In this struggle the muzhik has to make use, mainly, of his innate intelligence that enables him to outwit those oppressors of the poor and to survive. We see how he manages to achieve this in such tales as "The Muzhik and the Landlord", "How Ivan Frightened Away the Robbers and Got Rid of the Priest and the Deacon", "A Lesson for the Landlord", "How Yanka Freed the Muzhiks from the Cruel Landlord", and in one of the latest examples of folklore, "How a Poor Muzhik Looked for Truth and Found It".

A very serious enemy of the poor muzhik is the Devil, and it takes all the poor man's (or woman's) wit to get the better of the evil one. In this group of tales, among the best are, doubtlessly, the tales about "Paleschuk and the Devil" and "The Devil and the Female". In the first of these a very original picture is given of the difficulties suffered by the Byelorussian people that lived in the Palesiye, a marshy land with abundant, dense forests, the inhabitants of which are called paleschuks. In this tale we learn about the way in which Paleschuk overcomes the designs of the Devil, who considers himself the only master of this marshy, godforsaken spot of land. Finally, due to very hard labour and patience, Paleschuk transforms this hitherto uninhabited piece of country into a beautiful locality of Byelorussia for people to live and work in. Paleschuk, tireless in his work and of plenty of wit, is a powerful, generalized figure, embodying the will of the Byelorussian peasant for a better life.

There is, however, a form of Evil still more abstract than that represented by the Devil, and here wit and hard labour are not sufficient for Good to triumph. Superhuman strength and fantastic vitality are needed to overcome the great difficulties, including death, with which the young, legendary hero is continuously threatened. This legendary youngster, usually called Ivan or Yanka, is faced with incredible hardships, but always conquers them, for his one aim in life will always be to achieve Good, to help his people, to save the girl he loves from Danger.

These superhuman qualities will be reflected in the tales "The Blacksmith", "Asilak", and many others. Ivan not only overcomes everyday difficulties and dangers, but all kind of witchcraft and also such dangerous enemies as the sorcerers Old Bones, Chavalai and the witch Baba Yaga, alongside with countless fierce serpents, with a number of heads each, varying from three to twelve!

Such are the tales about "Ivan Byelarasieiski", "Chavalai", "This Tells Us How Three Serpents Carried Off Three Princesses to the World to Come", and others. There are times, too, that it is the girl who is endowed with extraordinary powers that enable her to live through countless tragic situations and finally save her lover. The boy, in this case, will no longer bear the name of Ivan, but Yuri, or some other name. You will find Yuri's adventures in the tale "Give Me Something You Have but Are Unaware Of".

In translating these tales we were careful to retain the absolute simplicity of the language of the original, — the story-teller who, at times, was rather irregular in his use of tenses, — the somewhat sly humour that confirms complete acceptance of the — at times — incredible situation described (that seems a far echo of the "tall-story", brought into literature in the 19th century by the great American realist Mark Twain), and the unwavering faith in the final victory of Good over all kinds of evils, whether brought about by landlords, the priests, tzars, kings, the Devil or witchcraft.

L. Cortes

The Squeaking Mouse

A lady was walking down the street and dropped her mitten; a mouse ran by, looked it all over, sniffed about, got into it and decided to make a hut of it.

A frog came jumping along.

"Who lives in this hut? "

"The squeaking mouse."

"I am the croaking frog."

"Come in and be welcome. We'll have a good time together! "

A young fox came running by:

"Who lives in this hut? "

"The squeaking mouse and the croaking frog! "

"I am the crafty vixen."

"Come live with us! We'll have a fine time together."

A bunny comes skipping by:

"Who lives in this hut? "

"The squeaking mouse, the croaking frog and the crafty vixen."

"I am skip-hop bunny! "

"Come with us, little bunny, we'll live well together."

A wolf comes, prancing along:

"Who lives in this hut? "

"The squeaking mouse, the croaking frog, the crafty vixen, the skip-hop bunny! "

"I am the grey wolf."

"We'll be glad to have you in our hut, grey wolf! "

A bear comes shambling along:

"Who lives in this hut? "

"The squeaking mouse, the croaking frog, the crafty vixen, the skip-hop bunny, the grey wolf! "

"I'm the big brown Bruin, and if I come in I'll bring you ruin! "

He *did* manage to get in and squashed them all!

A Speckled Hen

Once upon a time there lived an old man with his old woman. They had a speckled hen that laid her eggs on a low shelf in some straw. There was a mouse in the straw, that flicked its tail, the eggs fell and broke... The old man began to cry, his old woman sobbed. There was a magpie there that went and sat on the gate. The gate swung to, and clipped the magpie's tail off.

The magpie flew off and sat on a green oak-tree. The oak-tree asked:

"What's amiss magpie? You had your tail on yesterday – you've none today. Why's that? "

"It's like this: the old man and his old woman had a speckled hen that laid her eggs on a low shelf covered with straw. There was a mouse in the straw that flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry, the old woman sobbed... I sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped my tail off..."

The oak-tree said:

"I'll break off my boughs! "

And he did so. An elk came up to the oak-tree and asked:

"What's wrong, oak-tree? Yesterday you had all your boughs – today you have none! Why's that? "

"Well, you see, there lived an old man with his old woman and they had a speckled hen that laid her eggs on a low shelf covered with straw; there was a mouse there, that flicked its tail and the eggs fell and broke. The old man began to cry, his old woman sobbed... The magpie sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped her tail off; so I broke my boughs off."

The elk said:

"Well, I think I'll break off my antlers! " And did so. Then he went to the stream to wash them and the stream asked him:

"What's wrong, o elk? Yesterday you had your antlers and today you have none. Why's that? "

"It's like this: there lived an old man with his old woman, they had a speckled hen that laid eggs on a low shelf with straw where a mouse lived and it flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry, the old woman sobbed... The magpie sat on the gate that swung to and clipped her tail off; the oak-tree broke its boughs off and I shed my antlers! "

So the stream said:

"All right! I'll dry up, see if I don't! " .

So it dried up. The young maid from the priest's house came to get water and asked:

"Now, what happened to you, o stream? Yesterday you were deep and overflowing with water, and today you're quite dry! Why's that? "

"It's like this," said the stream, "there lived an old man and his old woman and they had a speckled hen that laid eggs on a low shelf with straw where a mouse lived and it flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry and the old woman sobbed. The magpie sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped its tail off; the oak-tree broke its boughs off, the elk shed his antlers and I dried up! "

To this news the girl said:

"I'll break up the pails! "

And she did so: took one of the pails and bang-ed it against the ground; took the other and bang-ed it against the ground. Then she threw the yoke into the ditch and marched off home.

When she came home the priest's wife was kneading dough to make bread and she asked the girl:

"Why so long? And where's the water, and the pails! What's the reason for that? "

"It's like this: there lived an old man and his old woman and they had a speckled hen that laid eggs on a low shelf with straw where a mouse lived and it flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry and the old woman sobbed. The magpie sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped its tail off, the oak-tree broke its boughs off, the elk shed his antlers, the stream dried up and I broke up the pails."

The priest's wife said:

"I'll throw away all the dough! " She took the tub with the dough and emptied it all out in the yard.

The priest came in and asked:

"Listen, woman, have you lost your mind entirely? Why have you thrown away all the bread out of the tub? What's the reason for that, I'd like to know? "

"It's like this: the old man and his old woman had a speckled hen that laid her eggs on a low shelf covered with straw. There was a mouse in the straw, that flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry, the old woman sobbed... The magpie sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped its tail off; the oak-tree broke its boughs off, the elk shed its antlers, the stream dried up, our maid broke the pails up and I threw away all the dough from the tub! "

"Well," said the priest, "I'll tear up all the church books! "

And so he did. The deacon came and said:

"Goodness me, Father, have you quite lost your head that you've gone and torn the church books? What's the reason for acting like that? "







*"We lived near to each other
with the fox,
then we built us
two huts:*

*I made mine with sand,
she built hers with snow.
As soon as spring came
her hut melted away,
but mine remained.*

*So she threw me out of it
and is living there
herself now."*

"I'll go

and get her out of your hut! "

*The poor hare
sobbed quietly;
he didn't believe
the cock could do
anything about it.*

"Don't be too cock-sure!

*The grey wolf
ran away*

*and she frightened Bruin
and he also ran off! "*

*"Never you mind
what she did to those two.*

*Come along,
I'll have a try! "*

So they went together.

*The cock stood
on the threshold,
beat his wings
and cried out:*

"Cock-a-doodle-do!

You brigand, you!

*I've spurs on my heels
and a scythe on my shoulder
to slash you! " The fox never moved
from her bed on the stove,
just answered:*

*"My tail is tougher than wood –
if I hit you with it,
it'll certainly do you no good! "*

*The cock jumped
from the threshold
onto the floor of the hut
and cried out again:*

"Cock-a-doodle-do!

You brigand, you!

*I've spurs on my heels,
and a scythe on my shoulder,
to slash you! "*

"It's like this: the old man and his old woman had a speckled hen that laid her eggs on a low shelf covered with straw. There was a mouse in the straw, that flicked its tail and broke the eggs. The old man began to cry, the old woman sobbed... The magpie sat on the gate, it swung to and clipped its tail off, the oak-tree broke its boughs off, the elk shed its antlers, the stream dried up, our maid broke the pails up, my wife threw away the dough out of the tub, and I tore up the church books! "

The deacon said:

"Well, I'll go and set fire to the Church! "

He made a fire under the Church and it burnt down!

The Hare's Hut

In a large, dense forest, there once lived a fox and a hare. They lived quite near each other, and were good neighbours. One day when it was getting cold, they decided they'd build themselves regular huts. The fox built her hut of snow, the hare used sand. They lived through the winter, then spring came: the fox's hut melted, the hare's stood up to the sunshine and warm weather. The fox came to the hare, threw him out of his hut, and settled down in it herself. The poor little bunny sat under a birch-tree and wept bitterly.

A wolf came by and asked:

"What'ye crying for, bunny? "

"I can't help crying, grey wolf. You know we lived quite near each other with the fox. When the cold weather came we built us two huts — the fox built hers out of snow, I used sand for mine. When spring came, her hut melted, while mine stood up to the sunshine and the warm weather. She threw me out of my hut and now lives there herself. That's why I am sitting here and weeping. Help me, do, in my sorrowful plight."

"Let's go, I'll throw her out! "

The wolf came up to the threshold and said:

"Get out of here, you vixen! If you don't, I'll throw you off the stove and it will certainly hurt! "

The fox didn't move from the stove, just answered:

"My tail is as tough as wood — I'll just give you a try of it and you'll be stretched out on the ground in a jiffy! "

That frightened the wolf and he ran off, leaving the hare behind him. The little fellow sat under the birch-tree again, and wept. A bear was passing by; he saw the hare, came up to him, and said:

"What'ye crying for, bunny? "

"I am crying for my hut, Bruin dear: we lived with the fox quite near each other, you know. When the cold weather came we built ourselves a hut each — she built hers of snow, and I used sand for mine. When spring came the fox's hut melted, while mine stood up to the warm sun. So she came along and threw me out of my hut, and lives there now herself. That's why I'm crying. Help me in my grievous plight, kind Bruin! "

So the bear went to the hare's hut, to throw out the fox. As soon as he came up to the threshold the fox cried out:

"Who's there? Don't you know that my tail is as tough as wood. I'll hit you once with it and you'll be lying stiff on the ground in no time! "

The bear got frightened and ran off, leaving the poor hare under his birch-tree, wailing sorrowfully. A cock was passing through the forest and saw him:

"What'ye crying for so sorrowfully, bunny? "

The hare started telling his grief to the cock:

"We lived near to each other with the fox, then we built us two huts: I made mine with

sand, she built hers with snow. As soon as spring came her hut melted away, but mine remained. So she threw me out of it and is living there herself now."

"I'll go and get her out of your hut! "

The poor hare sobbed quietly; he didn't believe the cock could do anything about it.

"Don't be too cock-sure! The grey wolf ran away and she frightened Bruin and he also ran off! "

"Never you mind what she did to those two. Come along, I'll have a try! "

So they went together. The cock stood on the threshold, beat his wings and cried out:

"Cock-a-doodle-do! You brigand, you! I've spurs on my heels and a scythe on my shoulder to slash you! "

The fox never moved from her bed on the stove, just answered:

"My tail is tougher than wood — if I hit you with it, it'll certainly do you no good! "

The cock jumped from the threshold onto the floor of the hut and cried out again:

"Cock-a-doodle-do! You brigand, you! I've spurs on my heels, and a scythe on my shoulder, to slash you! "

The fox kept on threatening the cock:

"My tail is tougher than wood — I'll hit you with it and it'll certainly do you no good! "

Meanwhile the cock has come up quite near to the fox, and finally jumps on a box near the stove. The fox jumps off the stove, the cock flies in pursuit and she jumps out of the door. The hare shuts the door after her and since then they have been living in his hut together with the cock!

The Cock and the Hen

Once upon a time there lived an old man with his wife. They had a cock and a hen. One day the birds were searching for grain in the dung-heap and the hen found a pin, while the cock dug out a pea.

The hen said to the cock:

"Give me the pea and I'll give you the pin! "

The cock gave her the pea, while she gave him the pin. The hen ate the pea, the cock tried to eat the pin but choked on it. The hen rushed off to the sea to get some water:

"Give me some of your water, o sea! My cock choked! "

"I won't give you any water unless you go to the boar and ask him to give me a tusk."

The hen ran to beg the boar:

"O boar, dear boar, give me a tusk for the sea, then it will give me water — my cock choked while eating a pin! "

"I won't give you a tusk unless you get me an acorn from the oak-tree! "

The hen ran to the oak-tree:

"Dear oak-tree, give me an acorn for the boar! "

"Not unless you go to the cow for some milk."

Off went the hen to the cow:

"O dear cow, give me some milk for the oak-tree! "

"Not unless you go to the hay-maker and ask him for some hay for me."

The little hen ran to the hay-maker:

"Hay-maker, won't you please give me some hay for the cow? "

"First bring me some bark from the lime-tree for bast shoes."

So she ran to the lime-tree:

"Lime-tree, dear lime-tree, give me some bark for the hay-maker to make bast shoes."

"First get me a knife from the blacksmith! "

"Go where coins are made, bring me some and I'll give you a knife," said the blacksmith.

So the little hen ran for some coins where they are made; she brought them to the blacksmith, who gave her a knife that she took to the lime-tree that gave her bark for the hay-maker. Then she took the bark to the hay-maker and he gave her hay for the cow. When she brought her hay, the cow gave her some milk for the oak-tree. The little hen rushed with it to the oak-tree and the oak-tree gave an acorn for the boar, who gave the hen a tusk that the hen carried to the sea. The sea gave her some water. The little hen carried the water to her cock, poured it down his throat and the cock cried:

"Cock-a-doodle-dol "

Why Wolves Fear the Bell

A district police-officer had a fox in his service once. She served him well, though nobody knew what she did — probably she brought him chickens for his dinner. Once he said to the fox:

"Ask me whatever you want for your good service. I'll give you anything you ask for!"

The fox sat down to think. She thought over and over again about the district police-officer's offer and finally made up her mind:

"I'd ask you, my good master, to give me your bell, so that wherever I go the bell may be heard and everyone will fear me, as if it were you yourself, the great district police-officer, that was coming along."

Her master agreed to give her the bell but said:

"Mind you don't lose it, if you do, or if you give it away to somebody, beware, for I'll have you skinned."

The fox swore all kind of oaths that she'd neither give the bell away, nor lose it, and went off into the wide, wide world. Wherever her bell was heard every man or woman felt afraid and gave her whatever she asked for. It so happened that the wolf heard about the bell that the fox got from the district police-officer. He was told that all and everyone were afraid of the bell and gave the fox whatever she asked for; he went to visit the fox and asked her to lend him the bell, just for an hour.

The fox didn't really want to lend the bell to the wolf, but he asked so insistently that she finally agreed:

"All right, old man, take it; but be careful not to lose it, for if you do, you'll lose your skin, for the district police-officer'll skin both of us."

The wolf grabbed the bell and ran off as fast as his legs would go, to get something or other with its help. He came up to some shepherds that were herding sheep, and said to them:

"The district police-officer sent me for your best ram; he said if you don't give it me he'll come himself and throw you all into gaol."

The shepherds didn't believe him and started beating him, then set the dogs at him; they beat him and beat him, till they were tired of beating him. They, also, took the bell away from him. The wolf set up a terrific wail; then he ran to the fox and told her how it all happened. The fox wept and cursed him, but nothing could be done. The bell was only a beautiful memory, now.

From that very day, as soon as a wolf hears the tinkle of a bell, he immediately thinks it's the district police-officer come to skin him, and he runs away as fast as he possibly can from that tinkle.

The Muzhik, the Wolf and the Fox

Once a muzhik went to plough a piece of land. Whilst he was at it a wolf came along.
"What hast thou come for, o wolf?"
"I've come to eat up thy oxen!" said the wolf.
"Thou art good and kind, o wolf! Please, just wait till I finish this bit of ploughing, then thou canst eat them."
"All right," said the wolf and went and lay down under the cart.
Meanwhile the muzhik continued ploughing and wept bitterly; and just then a fox ran up to him.
"What's amiss, why art thou weeping, o man" she asked.
"I am weeping because the wolf that came up to me wants to eat my oxen."
"Well, o man, if thou wilt give me a sack of hens, I'll send the wolf away."
"All right," says the muzhik.
The fox ran up a hillock and yelled from the top of it:
"Tra-ra-ra-rumting! The young prince's gone a hunting! What hast thou got there under thy cart, o man?"
The muzhik answered.
"It's just a log, master!"
"If it were a log it would lie on the cart and not under it!"
The wolf heard this and started begging the man to put him on the cart. He did so and went on ploughing. The fox ran up another hillock and cried from the top of it:
"Tra-ra-ra-rumting! The young prince's gone a hunting! What hast thou got on top of your cart, o man?"
"It's just a log, master!"
"If it were a log it would be tied to the cart!"
The wolf again begged the man to tie him to the cart; so the muzhik took a rope and tied him up in such a way that he couldn't move.
The fox went up a third hillock and cried from the top:
"Tra-ra-ra-rumting! The young prince's gone a hunting! What hast thou got on top of your cart, o man?"
And the muzhik answered:
"Just a log, master!"

The Crow

A crow had a great desire to fly abroad, and see what birds she could meet in other countries. She flew over, and all the little birdies abroad flocked around her and started questioning her: where was she from, and what went on in Vilnius, what kind of feathers did birds have there, and what voices? The crow listened to them all and also looked very attentively at the way they flew about. One birdie said she'd heard tell that in our country there's a wonderful small birdie with a loud and beautiful voice, that was called nightingale and asked whether it was true. The crow answered:

"Car-r-r, car-r-r, it's me!"

When the birdies heard her awful, raucous voice they began to pick at her and pull her feathers out, and finally she flew back to Vilnius. She built herself a nest and began to lay eggs. A kite flew up to her nest once and laid its egg in it. The crow sat on the whole lot and when the brood was hatched she noticed that one of them was different. She immediately began to cry shrilly:

"He'll be king Carr-r-r; he'll be king — Carr-r-r!"

When the little ones grew a bit, the kite — that was feeling pretty hungry that day — flew around the nest and saw that the crow wasn't there, so it ate up all the little ones. When she came flying home and saw that her little ones had been eaten she started shrieking at the kite:

"Carr-r-r, carr-r-r, r-r-r-ascal! " And of course the kite practically murdered her. When it left her at last, she flew to the river Vilia, sat on a stone and stared into the water; next to her sat another crow, also staring into the water, hoping to see a fish or a crawfish — for they were both hungry. Well now, our crow was the first to spy a crawfish and catch it, and was just about to eat it when the crawfish began to speak:

"You are such a beautiful lady! You'll be soon driving about in a carriage and four, your feathers are that beautifull and I've heard your lovely, tuneful voice; when you begin singing — all the world listens! You'll be ever so rich! "

And the crow, who could never resist flattery and thought a world of herself, cried out:

"Car-r-r, Car-r-r, true! "

Naturally, as soon as she opened her beak, the crab fell out of it into the water and rushed away down-stream. The crow looked after him and began to cry out:

"Car-r-c-ome back! car-r-c-ome back! "

You only have to listen carefully to what the crow says, and you'll be able to understand it!

The Catholic Fox

A fox was walking quietly along, all by herself, when of a sudden she saw a piece of roasted beef stuck on a thin metal rod. It struck her that somebody wanted to catch her; so she went by, without touching the meat.

A bit later she met a bear:

"Greetings, Bruin old dear! Had anything to eat today? "

The bear said:

"Nay, my beauty, not yet! "

"Come along with me, I'll lead thee to a place nearby, where thou wilt find something real tasty. I'd enjoy it myself if it weren't Wednesday today, and I shouldn't eat meat, for I'm a catholic, you know! "

The bear said:

"Well, well, my pretty one, let's go there."

So the fox took the bear to the piece of roasted beaf, stuck on a thin metal rod. As soon as the bear clutched at the beaf the metal rod struck at him and lifted him way up in the air. The fox, in the meantime, grabbed the roasted beaf, that was now lying on the ground and began eating it ravenously.

When the bear came to his senses he said:

"But light of my heart! It's Wednesday today, isn't it? "

The fox said:

"Ah! old dear, does it really make a difference to you what day of the week it is? ! "

Ivan, the Windfall

Once upon a time the king of an unknown kingdom got together a group of friends, a jolly company, and invited them to dinner. One of the company, of a sudden, addressed the king:

"Your kind highness don't be angered by my words," he said, "I've been eating at your table, don't think I've got some grievance," he said, "only you see you have one single daughter, and very soon she'll become heavy with child and she'll give birth to a bastard! "

The king was struck dumb with such an extraordinary piece of news: "How'd you come to know that this will happen to my daughter? I've only got one child, and is she to bear me a bastard of a grandson? "

"Well", said the man, "I know, that's all! I only ask you not to bear malice against me! "

At these words the king's wrath died down and he began to think:

"Dear me," he thought, "I never said anything, I didn't get angry, I didn't offend him; he ate at my table and offended me. Now, let's try to think how a thing like that could happen to my daughter. The servants wouldn't dare, the visitors never even see her! "

Thus he thought to himself, and went on thinking: "Why should I feel offended? I'd much better brick her up in the tower-chamber without windows or doors, so that no one can find a way of coming near her."

So he bricked up the tower-chamber and locked her up there with her nurse, her servant, that is.

The poor girl mourned: "Dear me, dear me, what ill have I done that I've been put here? Dear God," she wept, "dear God, just let me see a wee bit of day light! If only I knew why I've been put here! "

Then she thought:

"If only I could find something to pick an opening in the wall with, so I could see some light of day! "

And lo! right next to her she found a sharp needle and started picking and scratching at the wall next to where she sat. She picked and scratched, picked and scratched and finally scratched a wee hole through the wall.

You can well imagine how glad she was when she saw a speck of light:

"Dearest God, how happy I am; I'll at least see a bit of day light! "

Now this is what happened next. There was a very strong wind outside the tower-chamber, and it blew into the little hole she'd made to see light through, in the form of a windfall. Something happened to her after that — she was not the same she used to be. Some time later the nurse couldn't recognize her, she'd become so big. The servant was astonished:

"Oh! " she says, "Masha," she says. "What's wrong with you? You've become so big!"

"Oh! Nurse dear", says the girl, "I don't know myself what has happened to me! "

The nurse went to the king:

"I don't know what's amiss, but the thing is that Masha is different, she's gone big! "

So the king began to think: "Maybe she is false, this old woman. Maybe she's not an old woman at all! "

He simply couldn't understand how such a thing could have happened. He thought: "I'll have to have her examined. I'll have somebody who knows come and examine her". He had her examined, then he said to himself: "Maybe the company that came to dinner had nothing to do with it; maybe the fellow who offended me saw how she was, already!"

He kept on thinking and worrying and finally asked himself: "I wonder how long it takes the female sex to go about this business? Maybe the fellow who spoke to me about it had no ways of knowing it for sure? "

Then: "I simply can't make this out for myself, I'll have to ask people to help me! "

Well, so he was told: "It'll take her so many months more." Those people he asked counted the months for him, and he understood that she got that way a month and a half after the conversation at dinner. "Well," he thought, "so I s'pose there's nothing I can do about this business, but wait! "

After some time passed the ... — well, I suppose we'll have to call him his grandson, won't we, — was born. "Now that it's born maybe I can get it out of the way somehow?" he thought, and asked some people who knew about such things, some intelligent people: "I say, what can I do with it? Maybe I can get rid of it? " Then these people said:

"No, not that! What's done, can't be undone, let it be as it is. If you do anything, then you'll be to blame! "

So they took it and baptized it. They couldn't give him a patronimic of course, for no one knew who his father was, so they said:

"We'll give him the name of Ivan! "

Then the king's daughter told how all this had happened, how he came to her with a gust of wind, as a windfall. So they decided to call him Ivan, the Windfall. Ivan began to grow; but he didn't grow from year to year; he grew as the clock showed, from hour to hour. They sent him to learn things at school — his grandfather thought of that. What it took others a whole lot of time to learn — Ivan learnt it right away. And then he'd go out with the children for a walk, and the things he'd do! He'd touch one of them with his finger and he'd well-nigh kill him off. Or he'd play such jokes: he'd take off somebody's cap, then he'd lift the corner of the house, and he'd put the cap under it. So the youngsters began to think:

"How can he manage to do such things by himself? Let's show him what's what all together! "

But, you see, they were afraid to complain to their fathers. So they thought: "No, we won't do anything to him! " They saw that he was tremendously strong, you know! Well, Ivan kept on calling out to them:

"Ho, there! Why don't you come out and play! "

"Ah! Go play alone! What kind of play is it, anyhow, when you nearly kill one by touching him with your finger? Or go and raise the corner of the house and throw our caps under it and we can't get at them! "

Well, that made him feel still more playful and he started after them. They cried:

"We don't want you for a play-fellow! " And shrieked, they were so frightened. And when the teachers that were in charge of them, heard them shout, they understood that something was amiss.

"What ever's wrong with you all? Why don't you do the same to him?" they said.

"Ah! " said the boys, "you don't know the things he does! Whomever he touches he almost kills right off; he'll take off one's cap and put it under the corner of the house and of course none of us has enough strength to lift the house by the corner! "

"Why didn't you say anything about this before?" asked the teachers.

"We were afraid to go tattling about him! "

So they went to the king, Ivan's grandfather. The king wouldn't believe them. It can't be so. Whenever he looked at him, he was ever so happy: he was good at learning and had grown up into a handsome fellow. But the teachers insisted:

"He shouldn't be with other children, he should be kept apart."

So the king thought, and thought some more, and then decided: "I won't send him anywhere; I'll keep him next to myself! Even if he's good at learning, still, he's a bastard! " So he didn't send him to school any more.

Well, some time passed and Ivan became quite a grown up fellow. And he said to his grandfather:

"Grandfather, why don't you send me to study some more? I know more'n the school does."

"Eh! grandson! What d'you need more knowledge for?" said the king; "you've answered all the examination questions there, haven't you?"

"I tell you," says Ivan, "that I know more than they teach. Listen! "

And he began to answer all kind of examination questions to the king. The grandfather was pleased at first: "I'll send him to study some more!" But then he thought a bit, and decided:

"No," he said, "you stay with me, and serve me."

Then he thought to himself: "Why, what is wrong with the boy? People complain of him and he never says a word about that! Oh, well, if he doesn't want to speak about it, it's up to him! "

There were some battering-rams lying near by. Ivanka had never seen them before. He came up to those battering-rams and wondered:

"Whatever are these things for? I've never seen them before." Then he thought:

"Maybe they are not very heavy?"

Well, each of them weighs some two hundred poods (that, you know, is something like 7200 pounds). Ivanka is afraid that his grandfather may see him, but at the same time he wants badly to play a bit with this new toy he's found. So he picks one up and begins to look it over and all around, and thinks to himself: "He won't see me, he's surely resting now. And when he gets up he'll put on his boots and I'll hear them creak when he comes". But the grandfather doesn't put on his boots. He puts on galoshes and they don't make any noise, you know. So the grandfather walks about the house, looks at Ivanka first through one window, then through another, and wonders: "What next?" Ivanka stands there, rolling his toy from one side to another. Then he takes it up and stands it upright and says:

"Somebody said this was heavy; I wonder if it weighs as much as three pounds?"

Then the grandfather calls out:

"Ivanka, what are you doing there? That thing is mighty heavy".

Ivanka gets frightened when he hears the king's voice. He throws the battering-ram down, well-nigh a quarter of it sinks into the ground, and he jumps away from it. Then the grandfather thinks: what can be done to decrease his strength, to "unstrengthen" him, so to say. So he thinks long and hard, and can't for the life of him think up anything to do about this. So he becomes quite serious and even a bit sad.

Ivanka is quick to notice that something is wrong, and says:

"Grandfather! If you are angry with me, let me go and see the wide, wide world. It'd be better than your being angry! "

"Well," says the king, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you a task, and if you can fulfil everything I say, then I'll let you go and see the wide, wide world for yourself."

"All right, grandfather! And what is it that you want me to do?"

"Well, this is what I want, Ivanka, if you have so much strength, that you don't even know about it yourself, you'll chop enough firewood for me, and bring enough water to last me three years! "

Ivanka answers:

"If I do all that, I want you to do something for me, too. You'll get your blacksmiths to forge me an iron club. Only I don't want a small one. I want one that'll weigh three hundred poods! " (and that, you know, is something near five tons!)

So the grandfather says: "All right, I'll make you a club like you ask me! "

Then Ivan adds:

"Well, if you're going to make me a club like I ask you, have them make me some kind of tub to bring water in. You don't really expect me to carry enough water to last you three years with these here pails, do you? "

So they went to the brewery and took two great tubs and fixed handles to them. Then Ivanka went to the river with his tubs and stopped short:

"This won't do at all," he thinks, "I'll never be able to draw any water with my pails."

It's much too shallow here! " So he goes on to the sea:

"Ah! this is much better! There's plenty of water here! It's not a bit shallow, and one can, at least, get at it! "

So he comes up to the sea, draws his tubs full of water and goes off with them. His grandfather looks at him and wonders that he carries all that water so easily. Well, he brings the water and says:

"Grandfather! Where'm I s'posed to pour the water? Have you got a barrel for it? You said you wanted enough water for three years, remember? "

Well, the grandfather found a huge barrel among his things and thinks:

"I'll let him pour it here and we'll take it out little by little! I won't let him go so soon! "

You see, he thought he could fool Ivanka! But Ivanka says:

"Now, grandfather, you said I had to bring you enough water for three years, so now take the water you ordered! I'll get you enough water for three years, but what shall I pour it into? I'll bring you these tubs full three times — one for each year! "

"Well, pour it out into this barrel, " says the king.

He thinks that Ivanka won't be able to lift the huge tubs he's brought. But the boy empties one of them into the barrel the king has put out for three years, and practically fills it up; the next tub makes it overflow all over the place.

"Oh! dear me, child, that'll be enough water — I won't need more," says the grandfather.

"No," answers Ivanka, I've only brought water once, enough for a year, and you think it'll last you three years. I'll bring more water twice! Even if I drown your palace I'll still bring two times this quantity! "

So he goes off to the sea and brings more water, and floods the whole palace. The grandfather doesn't know what to do to make him stop, he practically tries to kiss his hands, begging the boy, but Ivanka just asks him where to put the water. The king thinks: "Why, he is trying to help me, he's simply doing what I asked him to! "

Well, Ivanka stands the tubs next to the barrel and says:

"I ought to bring you another couple of pails, but then, we'll let it go, as long as you ask me not to," and adds:

"Have you made me what I asked you grandfather? You know, if you don't make me what I've asked you, I'll bring you all the water for three years, and that'll be just the same as if I throw you into the sea. Just tell me, and then I'll see what I do," he says.

"Why, of course, I'll make you what you asked me for, Vaniusha," says the old man.

"And what about the fire-wood, you said you needed? I haven't even a pole-axe to bring a tree down, so how can I prepare fire-wood for three years for you? "

So the grandfather hands him a pole-axe he has about him. Ivanka looks at it and snorts:

"That isn't a pole-axe! I can get more fire-wood with my bare hands than with that there pole-axe! "

And he gives a twirl to the pole-axe and sends it flying into the sky — and off it goes, as light as a fly.

"Maybe," he says, "you don't want me to fix up fire-wood for you anymore? I can't get you any with that pole-axe, you know! "

"I need fire-wood, all right," says the grandfather. "One doesn't get fire-wood for nothing; but then, you've sent my pole-axe flying, so just get me the fire-wood as you can. Chop it with whatever you wish — I want my fire-wood."

"Well, grandfather," says the boy, "I'm afraid you won't want my fire-wood. You won't let me go, will you? All right, so I'll go to the virgin forest — the biggest, and the densest I can find." So he goes to a dense forest. "Why," he says, "there's nothing here for my strength, and nothing to chop up for fire-wood! It'll take me more than three years to carry enough of this stuff to the palace! "

So he walks about for quite a while in the virgin forest, looking for some tree that suits him. Finally, he comes up to an oak. It doesn't look very big to him, but it is bigger than the others. It is about four times the size his arms can encircle. Well, he pulls it out by the roots, throws it over his shoulder and goes with this fire-wood to his grandfather. He complains:

"Grandpa, you've made your gates very narrow; my fire-wood won't go through them!"

The grandfather thinks: "Goodness gracious, he surely won't destroy my pillars. They are very strong stone ones!"

"Well," he says. "Whatever kind of fire-wood you've picked up, just bring it in."

"Grandpa, I'm trying to be nice to you and you're trying to fool me all the time. All right then — look out!"

He hoisted the oak across his shoulders and marched through the gates. The pillars broke down on both sides and the gate collapsed. The grandfather says:

"Well, I don't think I want such fire-wood."

Ivanka doesn't seem to notice that the old man is angry; he just answers:

"You wait, this is only the first armful, and I've got to bring three of them for your needs. You see, I've no pole-axe, I can't chop the fire-wood in the forest, so I'll just bring the other two armfuls."

He puts down his oak and it takes up all the space in the courtyard; usually a great amount of fire-wood is stacked there. But one oaktree occupies the whole of it. When Ivanka brings two more great oaks from the forest, no free space remains at all to walk, let alone to drive. The grandfather says:

"Well, well!" he says. "Aren't you a ruffian, you?"

Ivanka replies:

"You see, grandpa, if I show you all I can do, then you could call me a ruffian, but as it is, I'm simply having a bit of fun!"

"Then why did you have to block up all my courtyard?"

"Why? because you yourself wanted me to do it. You thought I'd not manage in five years the task you gave me — I managed it in a day!"

Then Ivan remembered that he hadn't yet brought all the water. He thought a bit, saw that the club he'd asked for was nowhere to be seen, so he added:

"Grandpa," he said, "what about my club?"

"Whatever d'you want a club for? Can't you go and see the wide world without a club?"

"Well, well! and why do you think I worked for you, bringing all that water and fire-wood? We agreed you'd make me a club, didn't we? Maybe you are angry that I haven't brought you all the water you needed? I'll do that right away! But I want my club when I come back!"

The grandfather thought quickly: "My house isn't dry yet, after the first tubs of water he brought and emptied them here! If he brings more, well it'll just float away probably. I'll have to get him that club. But what the devil does he want a three hundred poods one for? I'll make him one weighing one hundred poods!"

So he took one hundred poods of iron and told the blacksmiths to forge him the club.

"There, Ivan," he said, "your club is being forged. Are you pleased now?"

"I'll be pleased if the club is like I asked for, then I'll even thank you. If not, well I'll put you where you'll spend the rest of your life — and surely not in comfort! And I'll go off to see the world! That's not a club for me! It's just a plaything!"

"Ivanka! you just hold it! I've had one made just as you asked me!"

"Now grandpa, you can't fool me, you know. I have an eye for such things, you know! And don't you think for a moment that I'll stand any nonsense!"

Well, the blacksmiths forged a club for him and couldn't even turn it about. He came up to it, picked it up and sent it flying up to the sky! It buzzed same as a bee and went higher and higher! Ivanka went into the house, drank some water, then went out again

when it was just coming back. He put out a finger and it hit the finger and broke into pieces.

"There, grandpa," says Ivanka, "see what your club is, like! Add more weight to it — just as much as I told you! "

The blacksmiths cursed and swore — they couldn't even turn the first club and now they had to add more weight to it! The grandfather said to the blacksmiths:

"Add another hundred poods: that'll be enough for him."

Then he called Ivanka up to the blacksmiths' workshop:

"There you are! " he says, "just what you asked for! "

"We'll see," Ivanka says.

He sends it flying upwards, then sits down a while, then puts out his hand when the club comes down. Well, it hits his hand and bends into a bow.

"Well, it's a club, all right! Only not quite! There's a lot missing! I want it the weight I asked for! "

So they added another hundred poods to the club. He took it and threw it upwards. Then he put his knee out to catch it when it fell. Still, it bent a mite.

"Fix it up," he asked the blacksmiths.

"We can't turn it over! "

Well, he turned it over for them and they fixed it up. Then he went to his grandfather and thanked him for the club.

"Bless me to go on my journey into the world!" he says.

"Oh dear! Oh dear! " says the grandfather. "How am I to bless you, Ivanka? Why don't you stay with me? "

"Ah! granpa, dear! No real hero will live where everyone knows him, and where he has shown his strength! Much bread and a lot of money don't make a hero, you know. Strength and health make a real hero, and are his wealth! "

Now it's the grandfather's turn to think again:

"So thou won't stay, Ivanka? "

"No! "

"Well, then, may God bless thee! "

Ivanka is mighty glad that he's been allowed to see the world.

He goes to see his mother first, and says:

"Thank you Mother, dear, that you bore me and gave me life! "

The mother begins to weep:

"Who's going to take care of me, now? You know right well that I gave birth to you outside the law! "

"Oh! Mother, dear! I can't stand this life here any longer! Grandfather," says he, "let my Mother stay with you! "

So his mother blesses him, and he starts off on his journey to see the world!

As he goes along he thinks to himself: "Well, thank the Lord that they let me out into the world! What a wonderful world it is, probably there's nothing more beautiful! " So he goes on his way and suddenly he thinks: "Here I am, walking on and on. Where can I find a comrade? I don't want to be alone! " At last he comes to another kingdom and sees there a real Hercules collecting stones. Such stones that look more like rocks or cliffs than stones. He pushes and rolls them about and throws them into the valley. Ivanka is pleased when he sees this: "Well! I like that", he thinks, "he manages those stones right well! "

So he goes up to him:

"Greetings," he says, "Gavriloushka! "

"Hullo, Ivanka! " says the other one.

"How do you know I'm Ivan? "

"And how do you know I'm Gavriilo? "

"A real hero," says Ivanka, "can always be recognized at a great distance! "

"Oh! " says Gavril, "you're lucky you have been let out to see the world; they won't let me go, they want me to clear away these stones! "

"Well, if they won't let you go, go away without their permission! Come with me and be my comrade! There's nobody stronger than us in the world, so what can they do to us? Let them just try — we'll manage with one club across five versts (and one verst you know — is about two thirds of a mile), and we'll war with them! "

"All right! " says Gavril, "let's be off! You know, I'll only go because you tell me to, for they won't let me go! "

"Ah! " says Ivan, "let's be off! Otherwise you'll stick here for ever! They're just like flees — once you catch them, there's no way of getting rid of them! "

So they up and went. They walked a while and found themselves in another kingdom. And there they found another Hercules who pushed mountains down into valleys, in order to make the ground smooth and even.

Ivan goes up to him and says:

"Well! isn't it just fine, the job you have! "

He grasps his hand and shakes it heartily. Then he begins to question him:

"How many mountains have you pushed out of the way in the world, already? "

"Oh! I really don't know. I've been working at this job for thirty years and many a mountain has gone into the valley! I'd be happy to refuse to go on with this kind of labour, but I can't! "

"Indeed? Why so? "

"Because that is my job! "

"Can't you just leave the job? "

"I'm afraid to! "

"Listen, there's nobody stronger than us," says Ivanka. "Why should we fear anybody? Let's go into the wide, wide world — it's a beautiful, free world now! "

"We've all heard about you, there is no real hero as great as you are, Ivan. We could do fine things together, and not such shameful jobs as pushing mountains about! "

"Then just stop doing it and come with us. The world is wide and beautiful! We'll go and have fun! As for your job, just forget it! "

So they went into the wide world. Ivanka thinks aloud:

"There we are, three Herculeses! If we could only find a fourth for better company! "

And Mountainous says:

"I'd've liked to do something worthy of my strength! "

"You've done plenty," says Ivan. "You've certainly thrown more than one mountain into the valleys. Isn't that worthy enough of your strength? "

So they go on and on, and suddenly they see a Hercules, just like themselves. He tears enormous trees out by their crowns and collects them all into a huge heap.

"Greetings to you, Forester," says Ivanka, "why are you gathering all the trees of the forest into a heap? You look like a gipsy, you're so black! "

"It's the smoke," says Forester, "the smoke and the fire. I'm all burnt! "

"Haven't you had enough of this job, carrying trees around by the crowns? Go, wash yourself and come with us! We're all clean and white, and it won't do to have you as dark as a gipsy, with us! "

"I can't leave my job! "

"Why not? "

"Well, you know, one's job doesn't speak up for one! But if you don't do it, your conscience won't let you get a wink of sleep! "

"It's not," says Ivan, "that we don't do our jobs! We'll simply take what belongs to us, our freedom, and go into the wide, wide world! "

So Forester looks at them and thinks: "There's nobody in the world stronger than us. And who can do anything to us, when we are so rich in strength and health! "

Ivan asks him:

"Well, Forester, old man, what do you think of my proposal? "

"I think it's fine! " says Forester.

"Do you recognize me? I'm Ivan! "

"I know, I've heard that there's nobody in the world stronger than you, Ivan! " Well, it was easy now to convince Forester to go with them.

"Only first you must wash yourself," says Ivan.

"I know, I must have a good wash, for I'm all burnt and smoked up! What shall I wash with? "

"There," says Ivanka, "our water will wash everything clean! "

Well, Forester washes and washes, and still remains as black as ever. So Ivan gets a cake of soap out of his bag:

"Here, try this," he says.

So Forester goes on scrubbing himself.

"Well," he says, "I'm still on the dark side, but I certainly look more like other people now!"

"That's a blessing, isn't it! We, real heroes, don't ask for more! Now, if we could just find somewhere to live! " says Ivan.

The other two seem rather doubtful. They say:

"Won't we get thrown out if we settle to live somewhere, where we don't belong? "

"Why, how c'n that happen? There's nobody in the world stronger than us, so no one c'n do anything to us! " Ivan says.

So they walk on and on, through a tremendously dense forest; maybe they walk a whole day – maybe even two. When they come out of the forest they see a house.

"Whosoever lives here won't live here any longer – we'll live here from now on! " Ivan decides.

So they begin to walk about the yard first, to make sure there's nobody there, then they go into the house; they walk through it – there's nobody there! So the others say:

"Maybe nobody lives here after all! "

"We don't care," says Ivan, "let him live as long as he belongs to our kind! "

They think a while what to do next and go into the yard again; they look into the cattle-shed. No cows about, only oxen. And nobody around to herd them, to feed them, to give them water! Then they go to the barn. It's locked, but Ivan goes up to it, takes the lock lightly between his fingers, and it opens immediately. They go into the barn – there's plenty of grain there – just as much as they may need.

"Well, to begin with this'll do for us", says Ivan, "and in the meantime, we'll grow our own! "

Now, from the way he talks he seems to be the master and his three friends are quite ready to obey him.

"You see, friends," he says, "we're all real heroes and we're just like brothers, all of us are equal, but one of us has to be the leader! I was first to go into the wide, wide world; I found you and made you come with me; I freed you from your heavy toil. If I hadn't come, you'd still be suffering, and, maybe, you'd suffer for ever. Now, friends," he says, "whatever I say – you must obey me. We have enough of everything now, and we must make sure that it'll always be so! "

So they decide to remain there:

"Gavrilo! Stonehard Gavrilo, you'll stay at home tomorrow and be cook; we'll go to do what must be done; we'll clear the land, plough it and sow the grain," says Ivan.

They have a good night's sleep, then they get ready to go off, the three of them.

"What'll I cook for you all? " asks Gavrilo, as they start.

"Go to the cow-shed," says Ivan, "take my club, and strike one of the oxen over the head; then take it to the kitchen, fix it up for cooking, and throw it into the cauldron! "

So they go off, and Gavrilo goes straight away to knock the ox over the head with Ivan's club, and fix it up for cooking. He puts the meat into the cauldron to cook, he's got

everything ready for his friends' dinner, so he sits down at the window to wait for them. Of a sudden, he sees four small birds fly into the yard; then, suddenly, they turn into four lovely girls. So he thinks: "Well, well, there are four of them and there are four of us: we'll make friends!" and he goes on looking, to see what they'll do next.

Meanwhile one girl picks up fire-wood, another brings water, the third goes to light up the fire in the bath-house. So he thinks: "I'll just wait! As soon as they get the bath-house nice and hot, I'll go over and lock them in; then, when my three friends come, we'll go in and get'em!"

Well, he waits for them to go into the bath-house and start washing themselves; they lock themselves in from inside, Gavrilko goes up and props the door with his shoulder from the outside. When they get through washing themselves, they come up to the door.

"Eh!" says a girl's voice, "see, sisters, someone seems to have locked us in!"

Then Gavrilko hears another voice answering her:

"Eh! sister dear, he won't even manage to count the stars in heaven — he'll fly so fast!"

Then she strikes a sharp blow on the door and Gavrilko — before he can wink an eyelid, flies several versts away from the house.

"Dear me, dear me!" he says, when finally on firm ground, "if I'd but known what was in store for me, I'd never have touched them!"

He starts off at a run to the hut, to see what's going on there, and finds that his cooking has disappeared, ox, cauldron, fire and all. So he thinks: "Maybe the oxen are marked with witch-craft? Ah, well I don't care whether they are, or not", so he runs to the cow-shed once more, kills another ox, fixes it up for cooking and throws into a cauldron, after getting the fire going. He tries hard to hurry, so that his friends don't punish him for letting them go hungry. They'll surely want to know what he was at, all morning. They'll think, maybe, that he lay in bed all morning!

So he worries until, finally, he says to himself:

"This can happen with any of them, I'll let them see for themselves. I won't say a word even if they punish me!"

The clock strikes twelve, Ivan comes in with Mountainous and Forester.

"Why, Gavrilko, you stone-hearted fellow," says he, "you've been asleep all this time, up to twelve o'clock, and you've forgotten about us. You haven't prepared our dinner!" He's very annoyed, indeed!

So Gavrilko says:

"I'm sorry! I let you down! It won't happen again!"

"Well," says Ivan, "maybe it won't, at that, but I'll certainly, not leave you again if you can't manage the work you're told to do!"

Gavrilko is glad that he can get away with it so easily:

"All right," he says, "let it be so!"

Ivan says:

"Maybe you had a reason, maybe something went wrong, maybe somebody bothered you, so tell us what happened".

"No," says Gavrilko, "nothing happened".

Next day Ivan says to Mountainous:

"You stay at home, next; only see that we get our dinner in time — we need a rest, too, and we don't want to wait around for the food. That mustn't happen again!"

So Mountainous thinks to himself:

"I'll have dinner as early as anything, just wait and see!"

So he gets up very early, goes to the cow-shed, strikes an ox over the head with Ivan's club, hoists the dead beast on his shoulders, takes it to the kitchen, prepares everything, then pops it into the cauldron. When he finishes everything, he says to himself:

"Whatever was Stonehard about yesterday? I'm through already and there are four hours to go till twelve!"

So he sits by the window and looks into the yard. Of a sudden he sees four birds, flying into the yard. He thinks: "I wonder what they're here for! "

The birds fly up to the bathhouse and perch on top of it.

"Well," thinks Mountainous, "we walked about everywhere and never saw the bathhouse, at all! "

Then the four birds turn into four human beings. "Now what kind of birds are they that have become human? " he thinks. Then he sees that they are girls. So he thinks: "Well, such lovely girls; they are four and so are we, but I s'pose it's pretty hard to get them. They won't come to us easily. If we try nicely, then they'll think we're muzhiks, or even serfs! We must try to win their hearts! My friends'll come : we'll get them all right! We simply won't let them go! "

The girls begin to wash themselves in the bath-house and he gets a stick and props it against the door, to keep them inside.

Then he thinks: "I've propped the door with a stick; I won't hear what they're talking about like that. I'd better prop it with my shoulder — it's better than using a stick, it won't break and then I'll hear what they say! "

The girls hear the noise outside and one of them says:

"Oh! sisters dear, somebody is propping the door, to hold us in! "

"Well," says another, "if that's so we'll send him spinning some two versts or so! That'll get him away from us! "

Mountainous hears all this and thinks to himself: "The mountains were surely tougher than you and still I managed to push them over into the valleys. You don't think you'll be able to do aught to me! That's just fairy tales! "

Then they hit the door so hard, that he flies a distance of two versts, before he's able to stop. When he gets up, he thinks: "My goodness! did I really fly two versts? I'd like to measure the distance, but there's no time. My friends'll come and'll ask me where I've been; I didn't hit myself very hard when I landed, I was simply dazed by the blow! "

So he runs home as fast as he can, but when he gets there he finds there's nothing left of what he'd cooked.

"Well, well," he says, "didn't I swallow the bait, hook and all? ! And I can't even complain to my master — he'll never believe me. He'll say: "You lazybones, you! I thought you'd do everything well and you've done still worse than Gavril! " No time to be lost thinking, I better start all over! I'll not tell them what happened — it's too shameful! I'll keep quiet; maybe I'll be able to fix up everything in good time! "

He went and killed another ox, made a roaring fire in the stove, put the cauldron to boil with the ox in it, then sat down by the window to wait for his friends. At twelve sharp the master with his two comrades comes along, looks about, says:

"Well, my Mountainous," he says, "is a mite better than Gavril, he's only loafed a little! "

Finally dinner is ready and they sit down and eat it. Then they rest a bit. Ivan says: "You know what? We'll rest well today, we'll not go to work; we'll get up earlier tomorrow! Tomorrow will be Forester's turn to be cook..."

On the morrow they get up early and go off, while Forester remains. He asks Ivan:

"What'll I cook, Master? "

"You know there's not much to choose from. When we grow something ourselves, we'll be able to change a bit. For today it'll again be what we had yesterday. There're plenty of oxen in the cow-shed, and grain in the grainery! "

So they go to attend to their toil and Forester goes to kill an ox, hoists it onto his shoulders and brings it to the kitchen. Then he fixes it up and puts it into the cauldron.

"Well, well! " he says, "every day the same food. If it weren't for the oxen we'd have nothing to eat."

He fixes up things about the room and goes on speaking to himself:

"Well, well, I wonder what they're doing now. About five hours more to go before

it's twelve and I've done everything I had to do! They'll find the meat good after several hours in the oven; if I'd known it was so easy, I'd have remained as cook from the very first day! "

So he goes up to the window and sits down there, to see what's going on in the yard. Of a sudden he sees four small birdies flying up to the bath-house. As they come they immediately turn into four lovely girls.

"Well, well," says our friend Forester, "well, I never! I never saw there was a bath-house nearby, and lo! there it is, the bath-house."

Then he sees that one girl takes up the fire-wood, another — the water, the third lights a nice, blazing fire in the stove — he can see that through the door that has been left open.

"Well, well! What d'you think of that?!" he says, "why one can have a good wash there! "

Then he thinks: "Stop! Wait! " The girls heat up the bath-house and begin washing. "They'll never, never, come to live with us of their own free will," he thinks, "we are simple muzhiks, they have no use for such as us. We'll have to think of something to win them over! Meantime I'll prop myself up against the door, to keep them inside. I've done harder things than that, pulling up whole forests by the roots, piling up the trees and burning them, so I expect I'll manage these four! " So he props himself against the door of the bath-house and starts figuring out the situation: "All right, so I've propped up the door; but maybe they're some kind of real heroic females; maybe they'll just give me a punch and I won't even be able to collect my bones! " Well, the girls are ready and come up to the door. One of them says:

"Oh! sisters, dear, we're closed in. Someone is propped against the door! "

"So what about it? " says another. "We'll probably fall into their hands when their eldest one stays home! But we can still escape from this one! "

And they just give Forester a glimpse of what they can do. He doesn't fly very far, only a verst or so!

"Oh dear, oh dear! " says Forester, "what was it that happened to me? Did I run, or did I fly? I really don't know myself! Well, what am I sitting here for? Something may happen at home, meantime! "

So he rushes off home, and sees that somebody has been around, but is there no more. He looks about and sees that there is nothing left of his cooking or his fire.

"Well, well," he says, "what good comrades I have. Neither of them told the truth! If they'd warned me, I'd at least've known what to expect! "

So he rushes to the cow-shed, kills another ox, prepares it, lights the fire, throws it into the cauldron and, all out of breath, sees that his friends'll be in quite soon, but he's just about ready for them. He thinks to himself: "Tomorrow our master'll probably stay to cook dinner! He'll find out everything for himself, we won't tell him a thing. Tomorrow we'll all have a good laugh at each other! "

Just then Ivan comes in and looks about him:

"Well," he says, "you've done well, friend Forester! You've done your job all right! Good man! All ready in time! "

So they have their dinner, have a rest and then talk over what they're going to do tomorrow.

"Well, boys," says Ivan, "tomorrow you'll go the three of you, and I'll stay at home. I'll rest a bit and do the cooking. My shoulders seem to ache some! "

So the three friends get up early and go to the forest. Ivan thinks: "I'll lie abed a while, it's too early to fix up the kitchen fire! " When he gets up he goes to the cow-shed, opens the door, and wonders aloud:

"Well, well, we've eaten quite a few oxen in three days, haven't we? "

He goes up to an ox, gives him a flick on the forehead, then picks up the dead ox by the backbone and takes it over to the kitchen. There he prepares the meat of the animal for cooking, places the meat in the cauldron, lights the fire and puts the cauldron to boil.

"Seems I've started all this too early; they spent more time doing nothing, than working! "

So he sits down and looks about him:

"Ah! the three of them are good-for-nothing. I wonder what they'll do in the forest. It's not much work to cook a meal, and even so they were never able to do what they were told, as it should be done! I s'pose they won't do much in the forest! "

So Ivan sits there for a while and even dozes off a little. Of a sudden he hears something that sounds like the blowing of wind. He looks here, he looks there, he looks towards the bath-house and sees four lovely girls standing there. He looks and looks and thinks to himself:

"Well, my goodness, what lovely damsels! Did they drive up here, or did they come on foot? I wonder! Just my luck to doze off and miss their arrival. Well, well," he says, "just you wait! I'll hold them here. Maybe the boys were having fun with them every morning and never told me about it? There're four of them and four of us. Maybe they did have some fun with the boys, but they're not going to have it with me, I'll simply catch them, if I can."

The girls went to the bath-house and he went and stood near the door. Then he propped it with his shoulder. They washed themselves quickly and Ivan heard them talking:

"Seems to me", says one of them, "that the master of those fellows that fooled around here, has remained at home today".

Ivan hears that:

"Well," he says, "aren't they really good-for-nothing? that's why they were late with the dinner! "

The girls tried to open the door.

"Nothing doing, sisters dear," says one of them. "You don't know whom you are up against. There's none in the world mightier than Ivan, the Windfall. If it's he outside, we'll never get out! Let's try our luck, anyhow! " says she.

So she tries hard to push the door — she might as well have tried to push potter's clay around. They all speak up:

"We'll just have to try once again, though probably we'll not be able to do anything! "

So they punched at the door over and over again, the whole lot of them. And it was just like they punched potter's clay! So finally Ivan caught the four of them.

"Now," he says to them, "behave yourselves young ladies! You are four and there are four of us. Let us be good friends, all of us! "

He himself fancies the youngest of the four.

You can well imagine the surprise of the three friends, when they came from the forest.

"Well, well," they say, "how did you manage to catch her? "

"You're good pals, aren't you? " says Ivan, "why didn't you tell me what it was all about? "

Then he told them to take one girl each, in the following order: the eldest girl went to Gavril, who saw them first, the second — to Mountainous, the third — to Forester.

So each of them married his girl and they began to live all together, as one big family.

But the girls are very much afraid that things won't be easy for them:

"We shouldn't marry; we are not supposed to marry; our father, you know, will simply eat you up."

Ivan says to this:

"We'll see! "

So they lived together for a day, and next day their father arrives, a terribly angry old man, who is known as Old Bones, and his voice thunders, it is that loud!

"Open the gates! Let the strongest come out; Ivan, the Windfall; there are no others that can stand up to me, he's the only one! "

Still the others tried to come out to him — he only just blew at them and sent them flying. Then Ivan comes out:

"Well, old one," he says, "it wouldn't be the Raven that brought your bones here, by chance?"

"I've always walked the wide, wide world through and through all by myself, brave youngster! So, what about it, shall we fix up things in a nice way, or shall it be fighting?"

"Seems to me you've already shown your nice ways," says Ivan.

"How's that?"

"Well, you just blew at them and sent my comrades flying like gnats!"

"Then," says Old Bones, "we'll fight. Here comes a manyheaded serpent!"

"All right!" says Ivan and takes up his club. He waves it once at the serpent, and gets three of his heads. He waves it once more and another three come off!

"I say, Ivan, maybe it'd be better to fix up things in a nice way? I've come to you with a small force, you know!"

Then he comes back again with a twelve-headed serpent.

"Ivan," he says, "how shall we settle our quarrel? Shall it be nicely, or shall it be fighting?"

"Not me," says Ivan, "I've never yet settled any quarrel nicely!"

Ivan was frightfully strong-headed: if anybody crossed him on his way, he'd never give in!

Then he begins to wave his club about, and each time he gets three of the dragon's heads. When he's finished off with the twelve heads, Ivan stops to think: "He'll never leave me be! He'll keep on doing me evil! The best way out is to get at him and kill him, that is, if he doesn't kill me first. I've got a flask of live water and one of healing water. I'll take 'em both with me, for just in case!"

So he up and goes after Old Bones, who's gone for more manyheaded serpents. He catches up with him and thinks to himself: "I'll just bang him over the head from behind! He'll surely fall asleep". So he bangs him good and hard over the head. Old Bones jumps a little and says:

"Dear me; am I trembling or what?"

Ivan bangs him once more; Old Bones sniffs:

"Well, well, I wonder if it wasn't a rose that hit me on the nose?"

He turns around and sees Ivan.

"You shouldn't have begun quarrelling with me, Ivan," he says.

He gives Ivan a flip on the forehead and Ivan falls unconscious. So Old Bones goes back to their house and takes his youngest daughter away. Now, Old Bones had an old woman shepherding his cattle for him. The cows she herded found Ivanka lying in the grass, and began to make a terrific row, mooing. The old woman went to Old Bones and told him about it, and he started bragging that Ivan, the Windfall was the strongest of the lot and he'd managed to kill him, and then he took away his youngest daughter from him. Well the old woman went out where the cows were and saw Ivan — she immediately guessed that it was he. She began looking about him to see if she could find anything and saw the two flasks in his bag.

"Let's see what these bottles have in them," she says and to try them she cuts her finger and pours water first from one of the flasks on it and then from the other. And lo! the finger looks as if it'd never been cut. "Well," she thinks, "just let's see if we can't help this nice young fellow."

She forces his mouth open and pours a little out of one of the flasks. He seems to begin to breathe a bit, so she pours some water from the other flask into his mouth. He begins to regain his senses.

"Oh dear," he says, "I've certainly had a good sleep!"

Then he looks around in search of his club:

"I thought, maybe somebody's taken it, but no, it's right here."

"You'd've slept your life to its very end, if I hadn't come across you", says the old woman. "You know that he's taken your wife from you, too? "

"He has, has he? "

"Yes, he has! "

"Well, that's just too bad, but I simply don't know what to do about it now? ! Granny dear, help me fix all this up. I really don't know what to do! "

So the old woman says:

"Ivan, go and work for him as his shepherd. Be very kind to the cattle and herd it just as well as you possibly can! You see, he has a white billy-goat with golden horns that tells him how the cattle is tended by the shepherd. If anyone strikes at a beast or hurts him in any way, he'll immediately tattle-tale to Old Bones. Old Bones understands his language, you know. If you work for the old man, I'll try to get your wife to find out where Old Bones keeps his soul — you'll never kill him until you find his soul. He's sure to tell his daughter where it is, if she asks him."

So Ivan goes to work for Old Bones. Meanwhile the youngest daughter cries and cries — everybody thinks she'll cry her eyes out.

"Now, whatever are you crying about so hard, daughter dear? "

"I'm crying for your soul, Father dear! Where is it? "

She has already seen Ivanka herding her father's cattle; Old Bones has also recognized him, and he thinks to himself: "This time I'll certainly kill him! He'll never be able to come back to life! "

Then he tells his daughter that his soul is hidden away in the besom.

So she buys some ribbon, adorns the besom with it; she cuddles it close to her breast and speaks in a low, crooning voice to that besom. Old Bones hears her.

"Whom are you talking to there? "

"I'm talking to your soul, father dear! "

He comes up to her, looks at her and says:

"Where is my soul? "

"Didn't you tell me it was in the besom? Well, I made it pretty with ribbons, and now I am talking to it! "

Old Bones snatches the besom from her, dashes it on the floor and it all goes to dust.

"There," he says, "see what my soul is like! "

The girl stands there, weeping as hard as ever again. "Dear me, daughter! What are you weeping about, now? "

"I was ever so happy I'd found your soul, I made it ever so beautiful, I began talking to it, and you snatched it from me and threw it away! That's enough to make anyone miserable, isn't it, that's why I weep! "

"What do you want to get at my soul for, I wonder? There goes our big white pig, that's where my soul is, in the white pig! "

So the girl caught the pig, collected all the ribbons she had, sewed them on a piece of cloth, covered the pig with it and began talking to it: she talked and talked, she laughed with joy and tried to explain something to the pig. Old Bones, of course, heard her again.

"And whom are you talking with now, daughter dear? "

"Why, with your soul of course! "

"What nonsense is that? What soul? "

"Didn't you yourself tell me that your soul was in our big white pig; so I thought I'd make it lovely to look at! "

He grabbed at the pig and all the ribbons and things flew all over the place. So she began to weep still more; she wept and wept! So he said:

"Daughter dear, you want to get at my soul! Why, not even the Raven can get at it. My soul", he says, "is by the sea; listen, and I'll tell you all about it: it is not an easy job to get it, for there are many servants of mine that guard it. First — the Raven, then — the Hawk, then there is a stone in the sea, and in the stone there is a duck, and in the duck

there is an egg. My soul, daughter dear, is in that egg. If you want it so badly – try to get it there! ”

The daughter runs to find Ivan – she gets away from her father somehow – when she finds him she cries out:

“Ivanoushka! Ivanoushka! His soul is hidden away in such a difficult place; you’ll never get at it! ” And she tells him all she knows.

“Let it be in kingdom come, I’ll still get it! ” says he.

After that he leaves the cattle, takes up his club and goes off in search of the soul. He comes up to the deep blue sea and strikes hard at it with his club. The waters split apart and he crosses it over dry sand. The Raven sees this, and wants to cry out a warning but Ivan asks him not to:

“Don’t cry out, please! You are a captive now, but I’ll set you free soon! ”

The Raven says that he fears the other servants of Old Bones. Ivan tells him not to fear anything.

So the Raven quiets down and Ivan approaches the rock where the Hawk sits and is just about to give a shrill whistle of warning. Ivan asks him to keep silent and tells him what he’s after. He says he’s already asked the Raven to keep silent.

“I’ll go and find the duck with the egg; you just sit here and I’ll set you free as soon as I get the egg! ”

“Better speak to the Kite, when you see him,” the Hawk says, “or the duck will fly away from you.”

Ivan sees the Kite and asks for his help. Then he goes back to the sea, strikes at it again, the waters fall back and he sees the stone, where the duck is hidden. He strikes the stone with his club, the duck flies out of it, the Kite catches it in the air and brings it back to Ivan. He splits the duck open and hides the egg away on his breast. Then he sets the Raven and the Hawk free:

“Now, friends, I’ll say good-bye. Fly away and see the wide, wide world! ”

“Good-bye, Ivanka! Thanks for freeing us. Only mind, when you aim at Old Bones don’t aim at his head or just anywhere with the egg! Aim only at his breast! ”

So they fly off and Ivan goes back to attend to his cattle again. He gets home at dawn and takes the herd out to pasture and immediately begins to lash the cows with his whip and frighten them. The billy-goat with the gold horns raises his voice right away:

“Well, now, I’ll certainly tell my Master about this. Those who treat us unkindly don’t live long here, you know; he won’t allow it! ”

Ivan leaves the cows alone and then says to the billy-goat:

“Never you mind, old thing, you’ll also get what is coming to you! ”

And just as they enter the yard he gives the billy-goat such a whack, that blows one of his horns clean off. Old Bones sees this and says:

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? How dare you illtreat a defenceless beast. And knowing that he is my favourite, at that! You’ve even managed to strike one of his horns off! ”

Ivan pays no heed to his words and whizz! off comes the second horn!

“If I’d known you were like that, I’d never have taken you on! ”

“I wonder you don’t seem to know that it’s your turn, next,” says Ivan.

“You don’t say! I really wonder: whatever’s going to happen to me?” says Old Bones.

Well, Ivan goes nearer and nearer to him, holding the egg carefully in his right hand. And it seems to him that he is facing a huge hayloft; but it is just Old Bones in front of him. Ivan thinks: “Well, he’s mighty big – I wonder if I’ll be able to kill him? Anyhow, I’ll try and hit him! ”

He throws the egg straight at Old Bones’s chest. As soon as the egg strikes him, he begins to wither away. He just manages to say: “Ah! Ivan, Ivan! I didn’t know that you’d already found the egg! Then that’s the end of me! ” And he disappears. And Ivanoushka remains in his kingdom and still lives there for all I know.

Once upon a time there lived an old man with an old woman. They had a son whom they called Ivan. They lived very poorly, because the old man drank heavily and he'd squandered all he had in drink : his cow and his horses, his sheep and his pigs — everything was gone; and he couldn't get drink anymore.

So he said:

"If anyone'd give me a bottle of liquor, I'd give him my Ivanka! "

One of his neighbours felt sorry for the boy:

"Give him to me," he said, "here's five bits for you! "

So he took Ivanka and the boy worked for him during four years. When he was fifteen, the master asked him:

"Well, Ivan, the drunkard's son, have you learnt anything? "

Ivan answered:

"I know right well what I want! "

"If you do, then go and get it, with God's help! "

So the Master gave him some money; Ivanka thanked him and left. He walked on and on, until he met an old man, seemingly a merchant. The merchant said:

"Good day, boy! "

"Good day, grandpa! "

"Where'r you from? "

"Oh! from far away. I'm looking for work."

"Come and work for me! "

"Why not? "

So they agreed on the time and the money, and Ivanka went to work for the old man. He worked and worked — you know it's easier to tell a story, than to live a life, and finally, after six years' labour the master asked him (by the way, his master was a sorcerer — he was a serpent, and a crooked one, at that), so he asked him:

"Well, Ivan, the drunkard's son, have you learnt anything? "

"Oh! I know everything better than you do, now! "

"Well, if you know everything better than I do, just go your way and look for another master! "

He let him go, and when he said good-bye to him, the old man put a big book into his bag:

"Be careful," he said, "not to open the book, for I'll be in it and will eat you up immediately."

Ivanka thanked him and started off on his way. He walked on and on until he got to a forest. He entered the forest and continued to walk on, when he suddenly noticed that he was going in circles all the time. He began to feel tired, hungry and thirsty, but there was nothing to eat and nothing to drink.

He sat down to rest and remembered that he had a book.

"Let's see what there is in this book he gave me, the one he told me not to open! "

And he got the book out and opened it. As soon as he did that, all kind of cattle came pouring out of it — cows and sheep, even pigs. There was so much of it that it was impossible even to count it. He cursed himself for having opened the book.

"Now, what on earth am I to do with all this cattle? " he thought.

And the more he thought, the less he knew how to go about it.

"Well, one thing is sure," he said out loud, "and that is that I'll keep alive: I c'n find water and I'll kill cattle and eat it! "

He barely pronounced those words when his master came running up to him, turned into a horrid, crooked wolf.

"Why, Ivanka, you drunkard's son! You haven't opened that book I gave you, have you? Didn't I tell you not to? I'll have to eat you up, now!"

Ivanka got a terrific fright when Chavalai (that was the sorcerer's name) said "I'll eat you up!"

"No!" says Ivanka, don't eat me up you crooked old wolf! Better eat up the best beast that's running about there!"

"No! I said I'd eat you up, and so I will!"

"Suppose you eat one each of the cattle running around here!"

"You know what, Ivan," says the wolf, "I'll not eat you, but you'll have to promise you won't ever get married!"

"How can I promise that? How can I stay unmarried?"

"Then I'll eat you?"

"All right, then," says Ivanka, "I'll not marry!"

"Well, you just look sharp: if ever you marry I'll eat you for sure!"

Then Chavalai went around, collected the cattle and made it all go back into the book. Ivan closed the book and Chavalai took him to the highway; from there on each went his way.

Ivanka walked for quite a long time and then came to his parents' home. He looked around and saw that they were pretty poor: no cattle-shed, no pig-sty, no threshing-floor — not even an ever so small one.

So he said:

"Well, pop, go and rent a cow-shed, a pig-sty and a threshing-floor."

When the father did as he was told, Ivanka opened the book and the cattle started out of it. It came out, in great quantities, it drank and ate and went each to its place — the cows with the cows, the sheep with the sheep, the pigs — to the pig-sty. People came to buy it. The more they bought, the more cattle appeared. In about three years Ivanka became so rich, you just can't imagine how rich he became. People came now to try and marry their daughters off to such a rich man. One came, Ivanka said:

"No, I won't marry!"

A while later another match-maker came. The answer was the same:

"No, I won't marry! Chavalai ordered me not to marry, or else he'll eat me," he said.

"You needn't fear," said the match-maker, "we have two such marksmen that not an eel will wriggle in, nor a gnat will fly past them! Don't be afraid!"

"No, I won't go! That's final!"

"Well, if you won't, you won't!"

So this match-maker also had to go away, but some time later came another.

"Marry our girl!"

"No, I can't. Chavalai will eat me up!"

"Goodness gracious! Is that you are afraid of?"

"Yeah!"

"Don't fear: I have two fierce dogs. They won't let anyone in."

"Well, if it's like that, then I'll come!"

"Good man! It's about time you agreed. When shall we settle the date?"

"Maybe Wednesday will do?"

So the match-maker left and Ivan waited till Wednesday. On Wednesday he went to the bride, and found a lot of people there. They'd already fixed everything up with the priest, so they harnessed up a troika (you know of course that that is a sleigh or some other vehicle, pulled by three horses), got into the carriage and were just about to start off, when, all of a sudden — for nobody saw him come from anywhere — Chavalai appeared, running.

"Well," he cried, "now I'm really going to eat you!"

He just made a dive at Ivanka, when the young fellow jumped from the carriage, cut away one of the harnessed horses, jumped astride it and rode off, as fast as lightning. He

rode, and rode, and rode with Chavalai running after him. So they ran — one fleeing, the other trying to catch up. Ivanka finally ran the horse down and it fell dead. He jumped off, began to cry and ran off again as fast as he could.

He ran on and on — what else could he do? He went through high marsh weeds, through marshes, through places where there was not a single path, not a single foot-track. Chavalai kept close to his heels. At last Ivanka, after going through a lot of high marsh weeds, saw a small hut. He ran up to it, but just as he wanted to open the door the hut turned round about, with its back side to Ivan and its front to the marsh; Ivan tried several times to run around it but the hut immediately twirled about again, always facing him with its backside. So Ivan decided to speak to it, and said:

"Little hut, little hut! turn your front side to me, your back side to the marshes! "

(Just in case you don't know, those words are used in our country, when our people come up against a similar situation with a hut!)

The hut stopped just as Ivan asked it to, so he went in and saw that Baba Yaga (the well-known old hag from our fairy-tales) was lying on the stove and moaning.

"Greetings, granny! " says Ivanka.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Greetings, Ivan, the drunkard's son! I'd never smelt a Russian here before. What brought you here? "

"Well, granny, the trouble is that Chavalai is after me! "

"Oh! " she says, "never you mind, Ivan! I'll fix you up! First, go to bed and sleep: I've got a dog that can smell a beast nine versts away."

"No, granny! I don't want to sleep; I'm hungry! "

So she got down from the stove, laid the table, gave him all kind of food. He ate his fill and went to sleep. Then Baba Yaga woke him up, because her dog began to growl.

"Get up, Ivan, the drunkard's son! Chavalai is coming, only nine versts to go! "

Ivan got up, had a wash; she gave him a loaf of bread, but told him not to eat any, no matter how much he'd want to. Then she added:

"Run that way as fast as you can. You'll find a sister of mine there! "

Ivanka set off at a run, and didn't stop until he came to another hut. He went up to it, but it began to twirl around, so he said:

"Little hut, little hut! turn your front side to me, your backside the other way! "

The hut stopped as he asked it to, Ivan entered it and saw a younger Baba Yaga, lying on the stove and moaning.

"Greetings, old one! "

"Greetings, Ivan, the drunkard's son! What's brought you here? "

"Well, old one, you see Chavalai is after me! "

"I'll fix that up for you. Just go lie down and sleep; I've got a dog that c'n smell a beast six versts away! "

"Thanks, old woman! But I've run so hard that I've got to eat something before going to sleep! "

So she got down from the stove, fed him and put him to sleep. He slept until she woke him, for the dog started growling, made him get up, for, she said, Chavalai was six versts away.

He got up, washed himself and she gave him a loaf of bread but told him not to eat any of it, even if he were ever so hungry. Then she told him to run to their sister. Ivan walked on and on and came to the third hut. He entered it just as he had entered the other two and found the youngest Baba Yaga's sister there.

"Greetings, baboulka! "

"Oh dear! Oh dear! Greetings, Ivan, the drunkard's son! And what, if I may ask, brought you to my house? "

"Well, you see I'm running away from Chavalai, and he's close on my heels! "

"Never you mind, I'll help you! Just go to sleep; I've a dog that can smell a beast at three versts! "

"Oh, no, baboulka! I'm much too hungry to go to sleep! "

So Baba Yaga fed him first, then made him lie down.

He just began to doze off, when the dog growled, so she made him get up quickly, for Chavalai was only three versts away:

"Get up, Ivan, as fast as you can! "

He got up, washed his face; she gave him a third loaf of bread and a kerchief.

"Now listen carefully," she said, "run this way until you get to the sea. Just wave the kerchief and a bridge will spring up. You'll get over the sea to the other side; once there, wave the kerchief again, and the bridge'll disappear. Then lie down and go to sleep. But first spread out the kerchief and put your three loaves on it — one at the head and one at each side."

So off he went at a good run. He ran until he saw the sea. As soon as he saw it, he waved his kerchief and a bridge immediately rose across the sea. Chavalai was catching up with him and Ivan just managed to cross the bridge and wave the kerchief once again, and the bridge fell through; Chavalai went with it into the deep blue sea.

Ivan felt dead tired when all was over, and decided to lie down and sleep a while. He spread out the kerchief, as the youngest Baba Yaga had told him to do, put one loaf of bread at the head and a loaf on each side. Then he lay down and — well, Ivan was like that — he lay down to sleep, and he slept twelve days! When he awoke he found three big dogs standing over him.

"Dear God, whatever's that? "

His first thought was that Chavalai had swum the sea. The dogs, however, said:

"Don't be afraid of us! We're not any kind of crooked wolves, we're your servants! "

"Well, if you're my servants, just tell me what your names are? "

One said:

"My name is Mountshatterer! "

The second said:

"Mine is Stonecrusher! "

The third said:

"Mine is Ironbreaker! We come from those three loaves that the old sisters gave you!"

"Well, if that's the idea, then let's go along together."

So off they went, the four of them. They walked on and on, and finally came to an unknown kingdom; in it there was not a single living being. So they went to another — nobody there, either, except the tzar and his family. A serpent had been eating up all the people in the two kingdoms, and only the tzar's family was left. Now it was either the tzar's turn or his daughter's. When Ivan came they were just dressing the daughter up to take her to the serpent's burrow. Ivan felt sorry for the girl and said:

"Couldn't I go and try my strength on him? "

"No use," they answered, "he'll eat you up! "

"I don't know whether or not he'll eat me up, but I think I'll go and try my strength on him! "

Well, the tzar's daughter went along to the serpent's great burrow, more dead than alive. Ivan went after. When he came near the burrow he saw there was a guard next to the entrance, who'd take anyone who came up to the burrow and throw him inside, for the serpent to feast on. This servant saw that the tzar's daughter was not alone, and he ran off and hid behind the mountain. In the meantime Ivan and the girl approached the entrance and the serpent hissed:

"Come on, Russian beef! "

Ivan answered:

"Nah! you dog's meat, you! You've had enough food. It's high time you choked on it! "

"Is that you, Ivan, the drunkard's son, there? "

"Who else? Come out of that there hole, you dog's meat, you! "

The serpent flew out of the burrow, and made straight for Ivan. Then the dogs that came with him threw themselves at the serpent and began tearing him to pieces! Ivan snatched his sword and started flailing around with it; he got eleven of the serpent's twelve heads off and the beast withdrew to its burrow. Mountshatterer ran up and turned the mountain upside down. Then the three of them rushed in and began to tear the serpent up again. He managed to escape, flew off and hid in a mountain of stone. Stonecrusher ran up and destroyed it, and they all began tearing at the serpent once more. He again managed to get away and hid himself in an iron mountain. Ironbreaker destroyed the mountain and here Ivan came running up and slashed his twelfth head off; that was the end of the serpent. But he'd managed to wound Ivan three times. The princess took off her silk kerchief, tore it into three pieces and tied up Ivan's wounds with it, and then they all went home. They walked a while and sat down to rest a bit, for they were tired out, all of them.

"You, Mountshatterer, rested while we fought, so now stand on guard. We'll rest a bit after our battle!"

They lay down and went to sleep, and the young girl said to Mountshatterer:

"Go on, and lie down, you too. I'll stand on guard over all of you!"

So he also lay down and they all slept for twelve days, they were so tired. The serpent's servant noticed that they were all asleep, and went after them. The princess did her best to waken Ivan up, but couldn't manage it. The servant ran up to Ivanka, cut his head off, took the princess along, and told her:

"If you don't tell the czar that I saved you from the serpent – that'll be the end of you!"

The poor girl got frightened.

"All right," she said, "I'll say that you saved me!"

In twelve days the dogs awoke. They looked around them and ... saw that Ivanoushka's head was cut off. They began to shout at Mountshatterer:

"We left you to guard us! And look what you've done!"

The poor dog began to whimper, then turned about and ran to the serpent's burrow. When he came up to it he saw a viper uncoiling itself and advancing along the road with some little ones behind it. He stood over one of them and wanted to tear it to pieces, but the viper said:

"Don't destroy my little one; it took me seven years to hatch them!"

Mountshatterer said:

"All right, but first get me some healing and some live water!"

The snake turned back and soon came with the water. Mountshatterer ran to where Ivan lay, they washed him with healing water and the head grew back to the body, then they washed him with live water and Ivanka opened his eyes.

"Seems I've been fast asleep," he said.

"Very much so," they said, "and if it were not for us, you'd still be sleeping!"

So they all got up and went off to the czar. An old man they met on the way told them that the czar would be giving a dinner, for he was marrying his daughter off to the servant that killed the serpent.

Ivan gave one of the dogs a bag and sent him to the palace. As soon as the princess saw the dog she filled the bag up with bread. Next day he sent the second dog with a bag, then the third one, and each time she filled their bags with bread. So then Ivanka, himself, went to the palace. He sat down at the table where all the beggars sat. When the princess came around with food and wine she immediately recognized Ivanka.

She gave him two helpings of everything, she filled his cup twice with drink and the servant saw this, got angry and began to complain to the czar! The princess spoke up at once:

"Father, dearest! This is the man that saved me from the serpent – not the lackey sitting there!"

And she told the czar everything, as it had happened. The czar saw that Ivan's wounds were tied up with pieces of the princess's kerchief, and he had the lackey's head chopped off. Ivan married the princess and they lived happily ever after.

This Tells Us How Three Serpents Carried Off Three Princesses to the World to Come

Some time ago there lived a king who had three daughters and a son. One fine day they went to the forest to pick berries when, of a sudden, a dark cloud descended to the ground and caught up the eldest sister. On that cloud there was a monstrous serpent with twelve heads. The remaining two sisters and their brother, half dead with fright, ran for their lives home, to the castle, and told their father, the king, all about their misadventure. Next day they went to the forest again; another cloud descended and caught up the second sister. On that cloud there was another monstrous serpent with nine heads. So the youngest sister and the brother ran home as fast as they could and told their father, the king, what had happened. On the third day these two went again to the forest. And once again a cloud came down; there was another monstrous serpent with six heads on this cloud and it grabbed the youngest sister. So the young prince ran to his father, the king, told him what happened and said: "I'm going to look for my sisters all over the world. Only you'll have to give me a towel and some straw".

So the king gave him a towel and some straw and said:

"All right, you go and look for your sisters, and may God help you."

The prince went off and walked on and on, until he came to a river. There he put the straw on top of the towel and the towel on the water, and crossed over to the other side as if the towel was a bridge. So he walked on and on and suddenly he saw a nest, with some tiny birdies in it; he lifted his hand to kill them, but their mother flew up to him and twittered: "Dear Prince, don't kill us, we may be of good use to you yet."

The Prince looked at them and walked on, without harming them. He walked on and on and came up against a bee-hive, full of bees. The boy wanted to get at the honey, but the bees begged him: "Don't destroy our hive, and we'll be of good service to you yet".

So he looked at them a while and walked on. He walked on and on and came to an ant-hill; he wanted to scatter the ant hill but the ants started begging him not to:

"Dear Prince, don't hurt us and we'll be of good service to you yet."

So he let them be and went on. He walked on and on, when of a sudden he saw a house on the very border-line of the world to come. A horrid old witch lived there, the servant of the monstrous serpents. Without her leave not a living soul could go over into the world to come. You see, the horrid old witch had two great grey stallions and whenever anyone wanted to cross over to the world to come she let the stallions out. If the person who wanted to cross the border managed to catch them, she let him go. If not, she chopped his head off. The Prince came right up to the witch's house, for there was no other way to go — just one road across the witch's yard to the world to come. And she said:

"I'll let my stallions out; if you bring 'em back to the stable, I'll let you go. If not — off comes your head." The Prince thought a bit, then said: "All right!"

So the old witch went and let the stallions out, and out they came, tails streaming, and galloped off straight to the forest. They galloped on and on, until they stepped right into the ant-hill the Prince had left intouched. The ants and the bees, that were also nearby, began stinging the stallions with all their might. They stung them so hard that the stallions rushed back to their stable themselves. Well, the witch saw that there was nothing to be done and let the Prince go to the world to come. There he walked on and on, until he saw a beautiful castle of gold. The castle belonged to the serpent with twelve heads and his eldest sister lived there. As soon as the Prince entered the castle the sister recognized him and said: "What for didst thou come, brother dear? When the serpent returns home he'll surely eat both of us". The Prince said: "Don't be afraid, only hide me in the cupboard."

So she gave him some drops that made a person awfully strong, then hid him away in the cupboard. Then the serpent arrived, and as soon as he came in he said: "Never heard of such a thing! What a stink of human being!"

The wife says:

"Eh! You're dreaming! You know mighty well that not even a bird can fly over the border line, let alone a human being. But then, suppose there was somebody here, what would you do to him?"

"Well, I'd give him some food and drink, I'd fill his pockets with gold and silver, and then I'd send him back."

So she says:

"My brother is here, he's come to visit us."

Then the serpent says:

"Let me see him! "

So the Prince got out of the cupboard and the serpent queried:

"Well, and how are you, brother-in-law? "

"How are you, you serpent? "

"We'll fight" says the serpent, "or shall it wait? "

"No", says the Prince, "let's fight! "

So they started fighting. The Prince caught the serpent in a hug (you remember, he had taken some wonderful drops for strength), so, as I said, he hugged the serpent so hard that his bones cracked. The serpent could barely pronounce the words "Some water! ". His wife, the Prince's sister, gave him some weakening water while the water she gave her brother made him still stronger. So the Prince killed the serpent, cut out his twelve tongues, stuck them in his belt, said good-bye to his sister and went on. He walked on and on until he came to a castle all made of silver. He entered the castle and there he found his second sister. She recognized him as soon she saw him and said:

"My very dear brother, why didst thou come here? As soon as the serpent comes he'll eat us both! "

"Never you fear, sister dear, only hide me away in the cupboard."

So she gave him some strengthening drops and hid him. Then the serpent came.

"Never heard of such a thing! What a stink of human being!

The wife answers:

"Eh! she says, "don't you know that not a bird can cross the border-line, let alone a human being. But suppose there was somebody here, what'd you do to him? "

"I'd give him food and drink, and I'd fill his pockets with silver and gold, then I'd send him away."

So she says:

"Well, my brother's here, come to pay us a visit."

The serpent says:

"Let me see him."

So the Prince gets out of the cupboard and the serpent says:

"Well, and how are you, brother-in-law? "

"How are you, you serpent? "

"We'll fight," says the serpent, "or shall it wait? "

"No, let's fight! "

So they began fighting as hard as anything, and the Prince squeezed the serpent so very hard that he could barely whisper "Gimme some water! " The sister gave the serpent some weakening water and the brother some powerful water. So he finished the serpent off, cut off his nine tongues and stuck them in his belt; then he said good-bye to his sister and went on. He walked on and on until he came to a castle of bronze. As he went in he saw his youngest sister there. You should have seen how heartily they embraced! Then she said:

"My very dear brother! Where shall I hide thee? As soon as the serpent flies in he'll most certainly eat both of us."

"Never fear, thou canst hide me in the cupboard."

So she gives him some powerful drops and hides him. And right away the serpent with six heads flies in: he smells man immediately.

"Never heard of such a thing! What a stink of human being! "

Says the wife:

"Eh! what are you talking about? Well, you know that not a bird can fly over here, let alone a human being. Still, suppose someone did come, what'd you do to him? "

"I'd give him food and drink, I'd fill his pockets with silver and gold and I'd send him away! "

And she says:

"Well, my brother's here. He's come to pay us a visit."

The serpent asks:

"Show him to me! "

Then the brother gets out of the cupboard and the serpent says:

"Well, and how are you, brother-in-law? "

"How are you, you serpent? "

"We'll fight," says the serpent, "or shall it wait? "

"No, let's fight! "

And they started punching and pommelling each other. They fought and fought, until the Prince killed this serpent, too. Then he cut off the six tongues, stuck them in his belt with the others, and together with his sister they went out of the castle. As they started walking down the road to the other two sisters, the girl said:

"I'm not grieving over anything, but I'm sorry to leave behind this castle and all the riches in it."

Well, the Prince took out his towel (the one his father, the king, gave him before he left), waved it about and lo! the castle spun round and round and became a small, compact ball of bronze. He put it in his bag and they went on. As they approached the castle of silver they took with them the second sister. She also said:

"I'm not grieving about anything, but I'm sorry to leave behind this castle and all the riches in it."

So the Prince waved the towel he carried, and the castle also twirled up into a silver ball, and he put it in his bag. They went on and on until they came to the castle of gold and took the elder sister with them. Just as they went out of the castle she also said she was sorry to leave it and the riches in it. So the Prince once again waved his towel, the castle twirled itself into a golden ball and he put it into his bag. So they went on and on, the four of them, until they came to that very same river which the Prince had crossed with the help of the towel and the straw on it. There they saw some robbers that appeared to be drowning. They were doing it on purpose: they got into the water and began begging the Prince to help them out. Well, you have already noticed how kindhearted the Prince was. He started pulling them out and they pulled him in and drowned him. Then they forced the sisters to swear that they would say that they, the robbers, were the ones who freed them from the serpents, and then they went to the king's castle. No sooner did they leave the place of their crime, when the little bird that some time ago had promised the Prince to help him some day flew over the river and saw him lying there, but still alive, and brought him some food. The Prince said to the little bird:

"Take two small bottles and bring me some live water and some powerful water."

The birdie did as she was bid and the Prince, as soon as he drank the water from the two bottles, got out of the river, and went to a tailor who worked in the court of his father, the king. There he offered to work as the tailor's assistant. Now, at this very same hour the king was finishing preparations to marry off his eldest daughter to one of the robbers. (Of course, he did not know that was a robber, but thought that he had delivered his daughter from the serpent). And the daughter had told the tailor to fix up a robe for her, similar to the one she wore when she lived with the serpent.

"If you make me such a garment, I'll give you one hundred roubles, if not — I'll have your head chopped off."







*And once again
a cloud came down;
there was another monstrous serpent
with six heads
on this cloud
and it grabbed
the youngest sister.
So the young prince
ran to his father,
the king,
told him what happened and said:
"I'm going to look for my sisters
all over the world.
Only you'll have
to give me a towel
and some straw".
So the king
gave him a towel
and some straw
and said:
"All right, my son,
you go and look for your sisters,
and may God help you."
The prince went off
and walked on and on,
until he came to a river.
There he put the straw
on top of the towel
and the towel on the water,
and crossed over to the other side
as if the towel was a bridge.
So he walked on and on
and suddenly he saw a nest,
with some tiny birdies in it;
he lifted his hand to kill them,
but their mother
flew up to him and twittered:
"Dear Prince,
don't kill us,
we may be of good use to you yet."
The Prince looked at them
and walked on,
without harming them.
He walked on and on
and came up against a bee-hive,
full of bees.
The boy wanted to get at the honey,
but the bees begged him:*

The unlucky man went home crying: the Prince asked him what he was crying about and said:

"Don't cry, master, I'll sew the garment for the Princess, you just go to sleep."

As soon as the man lay down to sleep the Prince went out into the yard, got the golden ball out of his bag, put it on the ground and waved his towel; a castle of gold arose there immediately. He ran inside, got the garment of his elder sister, then came out and waved the towel again, and lo! the castle again turned into a ball. So he put the golden ball into his bag and went to the tailor's house. On the morrow, when the tailor saw the garment, he simply couldn't get over his surprise: he thanked his assistant over and over again, he wept for joy, he was so happy! The garment pleased the elder Princess, she praised the tailor and gave him one hundred roubles. Next day the king was marrying off his second daughter to the next robber. So she also told the tailor to make her a garment like the one she wore when she lived with the serpent.

"If you manage to make it," she said, "I'll give you two hundred roubles. If you don't, I'll have your head cut off."

Just as before the Prince helped him, for the tailor begged him to. When night fell he took the silver ball, put it on the ground and as he waved his towel — a castle of silver arose. He entered it, grabbed the garment of his second sister, ran back and waved his towel. The castle once more twirled into a silver ball which he put into his bag, then went home, to the tailor's. On the morrow, when the tailor saw the garment, he simply couldn't get over his surprise: he thanked the boy over and over again, he wept for joy, he was so very happy! The Princess was pleased with the garment, she praised the tailor and gave him two hundred roubles.

On the third day the king was marrying off his youngest daughter to the third robber and she, likewise, called in the tailor and ordered him to make a garment similar to the one she wore when she lived with the serpent.

"If you manage to make it, I'll give you three hundred roubles, if not, I'll have your head cut off."

This time again the Prince came to his aid, for the tailor wept and asked him for help. As soon as night fell he took the bronze ball, put it on the ground and waved his towel. A castle of bronze arose and he entered it, snatched up his sister's garment, ran out and waved his towel again. The castle immediately twirled into a bronze ball that he put away in his bag and ran back to the tailor's house. Next morning when the tailor saw the garment, he simply couldn't get over his surprise; he thanked the boy over and over again, he wept for joy, he was so very happy! The Princess liked the garment, she praised the tailor and gave him three hundred roubles.

When evening came the Prince went into the king's great courtyard, put the three balls on the ground and waved his towel; in a twinkling three castles arose: one of gold, one of silver and one of bronze.

Then he went in and lit a candle in every window. He, himself, sat down in the castle of gold and began to read a psalter. As soon as the servants saw the wonderful castles they ran to tell the king. The king came out with all his guests and all looked and wondered, and couldn't understand where the castles came from. Then they began to walk around them and the king, who noticed that someone was sitting in the castle of gold, went in and said:

"Who's there? "

"It's me! "

"Who? "

"Your son! "

So they embraced and greeted each other and the Prince told the king everything that had happened.

The king ordered the robbers to be crucified on iron harrows, then he married off his son and they all made merry at the wedding.

Give Me Something You Have, but Are Unaware Of

A rich merchant was travelling home from the fair. His way lay through a dense forest — not a living being to be seen anywhere.

Darkness fell and all of a sudden all was inky-black. He decided to stop and spend the night in the forest, so he laid out a fire, hobbled his horse and let it go to feed; then he sat down beside the fire, fried a piece of fat and supped. Very soon he went to sleep, for he was quite worn out.

When he awoke in the morning he couldn't make out where he was: all around him there was water, a regular sea of water, with regular waves that were just about to reach him. "I'm lost," he thought, "I won't be able to get out of this place." The water seemed to increase all the time, the waves arose higher and higher. All of a sudden he saw a man in a small boat and thought: "Thanks to Heaven! it's somebody to help me! "

"Ahoy, there! Come and pick me up, for otherwise I'll drown! " cried the merchant with all his might.

The boat turned towards him and the man in it brought it up nearer but not quite to the shore.

"Save me, brother! " the merchant begged, "ask me for anything you want, only save me."

"All right," said the man, "I'll save you, only you'll have to pay me for that: you'll give me something you have, but are unaware of! "

The merchant thought: "What's there in my home that I don't know about? I don't seem to remember anything like that. Well, let it be so, there's no time to lose bargaining, I must make haste if I want to ever get home! "

"All right," he said, "only save me quick, and you can take whatever it is that I am unaware of! "

"It's not enough for you to say so", said the man, "you can always go back on your word. Take a bit of your skin, cut your little finger and write it with blood. You won't be able to go back on that! "

The merchant did as he was told and threw the piece of skin into the boat. The man picked it up and gave a most terrifying howl.

The water surrounding the merchant disappeared immediately and he understood that this man was neither more nor less than an evil spirit. Well, what could he do? He just caught his horse, harnessed it and started off home. All the way he felt most miserable, for his heart seemed to expect trouble. He drove the horse as fast as it was able to go, until he got home. He rushed in and found the house full of guests, though his wife was nowhere to be seen.

"Good day to all," he said, "what news? "

"Wonderful news! Your wife has given birth to a son," answered the guests.

When the merchant heard this his head swam and he fell in a deep swoon. They had no children, and Heaven had sent him a son, and he had sold the son to the evil one. His guests, of course, thought that he'd swooned from sheer joy.

The boy was really a lovely baby; he grew just like dough on plenty of yeast; they called him Yura. They sent him to study and he outstudied every boy at school; that's the way he was — good at everything. Everybody was fond of him, everybody envied his parents; but his father became more and more serious and even sullen every day, until the son understood that something was wrong, and he began to question his father:

"Tell me, father dear, why are you displeased with me? What have I done to make you dislike me? "

The father wouldn't say a word, he just looked at the boy sorrowfully.

"Aren't I your son? " asked the boy.

"That's my trouble, thou art not my son, for I sold thee to the evil spirit, before thou wert born..."

And he told him how it had happened.

"Well," said the son, "then, pa, I'll say good-bye! I don't know how soon we'll meet again. Even if I pay for it with my head, I'll undo what you've done!"

So he began to get ready to start. He made himself a bow and some arrows, took an extra shirt, a loaf of bread, a piece of bacon, a little money, and left the house quietly in the night, so as not to upset his parents.

He walked along until he came to a stream. The place it ran through was so lovely that he felt he wanted to sit down there and rest a while. He lay down on the grass resting, eating bread and bacon, when suddenly he saw twelve ducks flying overhead. He grabbed his bow, to get one as they came down onto the water, but instead they fell to earth and lo! they were no longer ducks but twelve lovely girls; so lovely they were that Yura couldn't take his eyes off them. They went into the water and began to swim; in the meantime Yura crept up quietly and seized the dress that was nearest to him. After they'd finished bathing they got out of the water and began to dress, but one of them couldn't find her garment. She searched here and there and everywhere — to no avail. When the other eleven were dressed they turned into ducks and flew away, while she sat there, weeping bitterly. Finally she called out:

"Whoever took my garment, answer me! If you're an old-man you'll be an uncle to me, if you're younger than I — you'll be my brother, if you're my age — you'll be my betrothed!"

Yura threw the dress to her from behind the bushes and as soon as she put it on he came out to her. It turned out that they were both of the same age. She asked him who he was and where he had come from? Where he was going and why? So he told her everything that had happened to him. She listened carefully, then said:

"Sure enough thou art on your way to my father. If that's so, well, I'll help thee, for without me thou wilt never get away alive. Many are those that have disappeared never to return. Well, fare thee well, until we meet there, for now I have to catch up with my sisters."

She turned into a duck and flew off. Yura went the same way she flew and finally came to a house, a real mansion, surrounded by a big courtyard; it was built on top of a hill. He knocked at the gates.

"I wish," he said, "to see the master." The master came out in rich clothing, all glittering with gold.

"What may you want?" he asked.

"Well, it's like this: you see I'm looking for my master, to whom my father sold me before I was born."

"I'm your master," says the evil one, "and I was on the verge of sending for you, for it was high time to have you here. And here you are, come by yourself. That's the way it should be; and it's praiseworthy of you, that you came."

"Thanks, master; but have you got my father's note?"

"I've got everything, the note and you, skin, bones and all. If you'll serve me well I'll give you the note and set you free — you can then go where you wish; on the other hand, if you won't work well, if you'll loaf and loiter about, I'll skin you alive. Now here's your task:

During the night you're to plough the field, to sow the millet, to harvest and to thresh it, to grind it and to bake me some pies for the morning. If you do that — I'll let you go. The task is an easy one!"

Then he turned around and went to his rooms.

"Well, well!" thought the boy, "he's sure given me something to think about. I've gone through a lot of studies at school, but I'm really at a loss now. That'll probably be the end of me!"

Tears ran down his cheeks in his despair, as he walked around the courtyard. He came to its farthest corner and saw a small hut. A voice he recognized called to him from the window:

"Yura, Yura! Hast thou forgotten me? I've been waiting for thee! "

He looked through the window and saw the girl whose dress he'd hidden near the stream in the forest. There she stood, beckoning to him. He went into the hut and was surprised to see how pretty it was inside. He greeted the girl and told her about the task he'd been given.

"Don't be afraid," she said, "go to sleep, everything'll be done. I'll help thee. Without me thou wilt never keep thy head on thy shoulders. So many people have fared ill here. Lie down and go to sleep."

He had to obey the girl — he'd no other way out — so he lay down and went to sleep. He slept well, for he was very tired after his journey.

The girl, meanwhile, went out onto the porch at midnight, waved a thin switch thrice and lo! thirty mighty young fellows appeared, all of them as like as peas in a pod; they stood before her, awaiting orders. The girl told them what to do, and off they went and started work: some of them ploughing, others sowing, yet others harvesting, threshing, grinding and baking and the pies were done in a twinkling.

Yura awoke early and his very first thought was: "Are the pies ready?" At the same moment he saw them — there they were, lying on the table, done to a turn, all golden-brown and light as feathers. Next to them sat the girl.

"Don't fear anything," she said, "they're all ready. Just take them to the table."

She showed him the place where the millet had been sown, where the straw and the chaff were put away, just in case the master wouldn't believe that Yura had done the job himself. Yura thanked her and carried the pies to the table.

Then the Master awoke, left his rooms and saw Yura standing there with his pies.

"All done, master, just as you ordered! "

Well, the evil one looked at the pies, touched them, tasted them, and could find no fault with them.

"Good boy, Yura! You certainly know how to work. You certainly haven't lost your time, studying. I really thought, first, that I'd have to make use of your skin! As long as you're such a hand at things, I'll marry off one of my daughters to you. I've got twelve of them, all ready to be married — you can choose whichever you like, she'll be yours. The only trouble is that you won't have a place to live in — there aren't enough rooms in my house. But then, you're a learned man. So, during the night, build up a stone mansion with as many rooms in it as there are days in the year: the upper ceiling must be like the sky: the sun and the moon must travel around it, dawn and twilight must add to its beauty; a river is to flow around the mansion; with a bridge across the river, built of gold and silver planks; above the bridge — a rainbow must stand in the waters of the river. In one word, build it so as not to feel ashamed of your work when people come to see it.

If you build such a mansion during the night, you'll be my son-in-law. If not — off comes your head. That's the way I am — either real nice or real nasty. Now, get along with you."

"I wish he'd go to Hell, the evil devil! " he thought, "every job he gives is worse than the previous one. What am I to do? I'll have to go and see my girl and ask her to help me! "

He went to her and told her all about the new task.

"Never worry! Everything will be done, and it will all be ready in time," she said, "meanwhile, go, walk about the yard, make believe that thou art choosing the place to build on."

He did as he was told: he walked, and looked, and measured, at last, late in the evening, he went back to the girl's hut. It was far from midnight as yet, so they chatted together a while.

"Why dost thou live in this hut, all by thyself, while thy sisters live with thy father in the stone mansion?" asked Yura.

"Well, I've been pushed out into the yard, because I have no mother, only a stepmother. She has occupied all the rooms of the stone mansion with her daughters and I've been put into this hut!"

After a while they both lay down to sleep; at midnight the girl got up, went out, waved her little switch thrice and the thirty handsome young fellows stood in front of her, waiting for her orders. She said:

"During the night build up a stone mansion with as many rooms in it as there are days in the year, the upper ceiling must be like the sky, the sun and the moon must travel around it, dawn and twilight must add to its beauty; make a river flow around it and throw a bridge across the river, built of gold and silver planks; above the bridge — a rainbow must stand in the waters of the river."

As soon as she gave them the task, they set to work — some cutting stones, others sawing, yet others paring — at daybreak the building was finished. Yura came out into the yard and couldn't tear himself away from the beautiful sight: a stone mansion reaching up to the sky, a rainbow spilling its colours above it, the bridge seeming to be aglow with fire; he went inside and was blinded with the beauty of the sun and the dawn.

Then he went to the bridge and stood there, waiting for the master. The evil one was early on his feet that morning and immediately came out to see the work done during the night.

"Well, Yura, good fellow! it's worthy of my daughter — if that's your work — I've nothing to say against it. You've done your best, and it's good. It's for yourself, too, however. But while we start preparations for the wedding I have another job for you. I've a good stallion, it's above and beyond price, but it's not broken in yet. So you break him in before the wedding festivity."

"All right, master," says Yura, "I'll break him in tomorrow."

The stepmother came out with her daughters, to have a look at the new mansion. They were astonished at its beauty, and when they heard that the father was going to marry one of them off to the man who built such a wonder — each of them wanted to be the one, of course. Naturally their mother wanted more than anything in the world that one of her daughters should get such a husband.

Well, our Yura went to his girl's hut as soon as dusk fell. He told her about his new job and added:

"This time I'm not afraid, it's the kind of thing I like. I can break in any stallion living!"

"Don't be too sure," said the girl, "and don't brag beforehand; this is the toughest job of all! Thou thinkest that the stallion is a real one? No, it'll be my father, in person. He doesn't believe that thou hast built the mansion thyself! But fear not, I'll help thee out with this job, too. Sleep well!"

Yura obeyed and went and had a good sleep. The girl awakened him in the morning.

"Go, break the stallion in," she said, "here is my magic switch; if the stallion starts showing his temper, just let him have it between the ears with this little switch and he'll cool down immediately."

Yura took the switch and went off to the stables: the stallion, his horse-hair all golden and silvery, his eyes rolling and blood-shot, his nostrils wide with the fire that issued from them, his ears letting out smoke, stood there, beating the ground with his hoof, and there was no way to approach him. Yura waved the switch at the beast — to no avail; he came up to the creature — the stallion reared and pranced, no way of getting astride him, he neighed and the walls of the stable shook and the roof rattled. Yura finally managed to give the beast a whack with the switch between his ears, and the stallion knelt on the ground. Yura lost no time and was astride him in a wink. The stallion reared once again, very nearly threw the youth off and went prancing out of the stable. Yura kept on lashing him

between the ears with the little switch and the stallion carried him over hills and dales, through forests and marshes until, quite exhausted, he turned homewards. His crazy gallop broke into a trot and they were soon near the stable. Yura left him there and went into the yard, but no one would speak to him on his way.

Finally he went to the girl's hut.

"Thou surely hast given my father a hot time, for I see thou hast come back safe and sound thyself! Go to sleep, thou lookest all done in."

He had a good night's sleep and in the morning a messenger came from the master, calling the young girl to her father's presence.

"Well," she said, "thou wilt be called next to come and choose thyself a wife. We twelve are all alike, so if thou wantest me for a wife be sure to look at my brow: there'll be a fly on it."

Just as she said, in a little while Yura was called to the master's presence. The master came out to Yura with a bandage across his brow.

"Well, son-in-law, choose your wife: the one you want is yours. It will be as I said."

They went into the room; Yura looked at the girls — exactly the same in features and in appearance all of them. He looked more carefully, saw a fly on the brow of one of them, caught the girl's hand in his own:

"This one will be my wife," he said.

"You chose her," said the evil one, "she's yours; all my children are alike. Live together and be happy."

The stepmother went green with anger that he didn't choose one of her daughters. "You just wait," she thought, "I'll make life miserable for you!"

The young pair went to spend the night in the girl's small hut, for the new building was being made ready for the feasting. When they got there, the girl said:

"We'll have to sleep now, for at midnight we'll have to start on our way. We'll go to thy country, otherwise my stepmother will destroy us in one way or another."

They lay down and rested for a while. At midnight they got up and got ready to go. The girl spat in every corner of her hut and told Yura to do the same. Then they went away as fast as they could. Daybreak came, everybody began to rise from sleep, everybody expected the young couple to come to the big house. As they didn't appear, the servants were sent to awaken them.

"Get up, it's morning already."

"We'll get up right away," answered the spittle.

The sun neared the midday mark, and still the young couple didn't appear. Again servants were sent to make them hurry.

"Get up," they shouted, "it's close on midday."

"We're getting dressed," answered the spittle.

It was time for lunch, and still they didn't come. The servants came to call them to table.

"We're washing ourselves," answered the spittle.

By dinner time, when the servants came to call them, the spittle had dried up and there was no answer. The servants broke down the door — the hut was empty. When they told the evil one that there was nobody in the hut, he got so terribly angry that he began banging his head against the wall. The stepmother shrieked at the top of her voice:

"Send men in pursuit — have them brought home, either dead or alive!"

Men were sent in pursuit; they went galloping as fast as the horses would go. The young pair kept running as fast as they could. The girl suddenly lay down with her ear to the ground, listened a bit and said:

"Oh dear, oh dear! Seems that the pursuers are galloping after us; they'll catch up with us in no time. Let's run faster, and when they appear I'll turn into a lamb and turn thee into a shepherd. When they ask whether thou hast seen a young man and a girl go by, say no, thou hast not seen anybody."

Soon the pursuers appeared. The girl swished her magic wand, became a lamb, and turned Yura into a shepherd.

"You haven't seen a man and a girl running along the road, little shepherd?"

"I've been here since early morning with my lamb, and haven't seen anyone."

So the pursuers went home, for they thought they'd lost the way. They came back and told the master they'd seen nobody but a shepherd with his lamb, who'd been there since early morning and said that not a soul had gone by that way.

"A shepherd and a lamb? They are the two culprits! Go after them quick and cut them up with your axes," cried the evil one.

The pursuers went off again, but naturally Yura and the girl were far away already. However, the earth seemed to hum under their feet and when the girl lay down on the ground to listen, she said:

"They're coming."

They ran a bit more and the pursuers appeared in the distance. The girl swished her magic wand, she herself became a garden and Yura — a gardener.

The pursuers come up to the garden and asked the gardener:

"You haven't seen a man and a girl running along the road, have you?"

"No, I haven't seen a soul. I've been quite some time here, caring for the garden."

"Maybe you've seen a shepherd with a small lamb?"

"Haven't seen any shepherd either."

The pursuers went back, for they again thought they'd lost their way. Yura and the girl continued to run as fast as they could. When the pursuers got home they told the master:

"We didn't find anyone. Seems they just dissolved into thin air. We saw a gardener taking care of his garden and he said he'd seen nobody running along the road, nor did the shepherd with the lamb pass him; we decided to come back — no use looking for a needle in a haystack!"

"You fools, you!" screamed both the evil one and his wife, "you should've cut down the garden and chopped up the gardener, for they were our runaways. Not much hope that you'll do what you're told, is there? We'll have to go ourselves."

So both the master and his wife started off in pursuit of the unfortunate youngsters, together with their servants. They galloped at such speed, that it seemed they flew. Dust rose like smoke, the earth trembled and hummed. Yura and the girl were nearing home already when they heard the noise of the pursuit quite near. They ran faster, for they guessed that the girl's father and step-mother were coming after them. The hum of the pursuit came stronger and stronger, nearer and nearer ...

"No," said the girl, "we'll not reach thy house. I must save thee, at least!"

She turned herself into a river and Yura into a fisherman. Quite soon after this, the pursuers appeared and without saying a single word began to chop the river up with their axes. The water in the river ran red with blood. All this while Yura stood on the other side of the river; he couldn't help his girl in any way, he didn't know what to do.

"Now just lie there and die, damn you," the two evil ones said to the river, "and you, take good care, we'll get at you, too!"

They said that to Yura and turned homewards.

Yura heard the river moan:

"Oh dear me! dear me! What pain, what terrible pain. I'll have to spend some time here till my wounds heal, it'll be some time till we see each other. Go home, Yura, only don't forget me! So that thou dostn't forget me see that thou dostn't kiss anyone. If thou dost, thou wilt forget me right away. Come and visit me here..."

Yura went home very sad and upset, for he'd hoped to return with his betrothed.

He came home and his parents were so very glad to see him that they nearly lost their mind for joy! The only thing that surprised them, was that he wouldn't kiss anybody, not even them. But then, they thought, things like that happen at times. So Yura lived with

his parents, and he brought them a lot of happiness. On Saturdays he'd go to the river, and speak to it. He'd take a clean shirt from the river for the coming week and leave the dirty one there. Then he'd go home — expecting the poor girl's wounds to heal soon.

Quite some time passed, the river seemed to become clearer, the girl's wounds healed little by little. And all of a sudden a terrible thing happened: Yura was asleep once; an old man came to their house and kissed him, while he slept. When Yura awoke — he'd forgotten all about his girl.

Some more time elapsed and Yura decided he should get married. His parents had long chosen a lovely girl for him. Yura seemed to like her so it was agreed to celebrate their marriage. The wedding feast was going to be wonderful, but Yura did not seem happy; he himself didn't know why. The women began to knead the dough for the wedding loaf, made small birds out of dough to put on the loaf. They were all busy, when a young woman came in and said:

"Allow me to make a duck and a drake for the loaf."

So they allowed her, and she made a small duck and a drake out of the dough. She placed the drake on the loaf that was to go to the groom, and held the duck in her hands, speaking to it:

"Thou hast forgotten, my drake, how I helped thee out of so much trouble!" and she made the duck peck the drake on its head. "Thou hast forgotten how I cared for thy head!" and again the duck pecked the drake's head; "Thou hast forgotten how I left my home and parents for thee, and ran away with thee," and another peck, "remember how I lay wounded to save thee!" and yet another peck.

And suddenly Yura remembered all that had happened to him; he recognized his girl (it was she, of course) and took her in his arms.

"Father, Mother, here is my wife!" he cried. "She saved me from a life of slavery!"

He made her sit down next to himself, he gave a present of fine beads to the girl whom he was going to marry, and she went away. He and his lovely bride lived a long and happy life together.

The Blacksmith

Once upon a time, in a kingdom far-away, there was a great famine; it was not only the cattle that had nothing to eat, but people also went hungry. They even ate fodder, that was meant for the animals, still they died just as flies die in autumn. However, as we know, while some die — others are born; and the worse the famine, the more babies are born. The czar of that kingdom ordered the new-born babies to be killed, so as not to allow the number of people to increase, for even the rich had no food. Well, the czar's servants went around either killing the babies or drowning them in the river, as if they were puppies. The mothers wept and wrung their hands and pulled at their hair. Naturally, mothers always grieve for their children, while the czar's servants have no pity — they simply kill the babies, shedding their angelic blood mercilessly.

It was during those awful, dark years that a young woman lived in that kingdom. She was already big with child when her masters took her into service. When her time approached she began to fear that the czar's servants would kill her baby. What could she do? Where could she hide her baby after it was born? She thought this over and over again and finally came to a decision: she cut up some stuff to swaddle the baby in, put it into a bast casket that she threw over her shoulder, and went into the forest.

Everybody knows that the forest is mighty big — there's no end to it. You can live there for many, many years and not a soul will touch you. The young woman walked in the forest, picking berries to quench her thirst. And then, suddenly she found that she'd walked so far that it seemed that nobody had ever been there before her. She looked

around and picked out a tree with a nice big hollow in it, cleaned it out and fixed up a hut for herself in it. A stream with crystal clear water flowed quite near, and the young woman felt safe living there, drinking water from the stream, feeding on berries and mushrooms. She laid up a store of berries and mushrooms, nuts and edible roots, and then settled herself in her hut to wait for her time. She busied herself sewing a shirt for her baby and found that she'd eaten up all the berries and mushrooms from her store; so she got out of her hollow, took her basket and went to seek for more mushrooms. Walking about she suddenly came across a bear's lair. Apparently the mother bear had gone to hunt for food, and in the meantime a goshawk attacked the small bears and was pecking away at them. The young woman saw this, felt sorry for the little ones and, grabbing a heavy branch, began beating the goshawk, till it fell dead. Here the mother bear appeared, saw that the woman had defended her little ones and began to thank her: she fell to the feet of the woman, began to lick them, roaring all the while, and shedding great big tears. When the young woman went back to her hut in the hollow of the tree, the mother bear followed her, saw her climb into the hollow, then went to her little ones.

Later on the young woman sat in her hut, sorting out her mushrooms and singing something softly, to herself. Suddenly she saw the mother bear come out of the bushes and walk up to her tree. At first she felt very frightened and her heart began thumping dreadfully. The bear, in the meantime, came up to the hollow in the tree, put some fresh honeycombs there and quietly went off into the bushes. The young woman guessed that the mother bear had brought her some honey to thank her for having defended her little ones. She continued to live in her little hut, and the mother bear kept bringing her honey. Then she started to bring her birds' eggs and other kind of eatables. Some time later the woman gave birth to a handsome baby boy. He had a small sun, shining on his brow, and a new moon at the back of his head. The woman tied her kerchief around the baby's head and kept it there day and night, for the light of the sun was too brilliant to bear. The boy grew beautifully, and in a year or so he was as tall as his mother. The mother bear kept on bringing them all kind of food, then she brought her little ones — that were also growing nicely — to the tree where the woman lived with her son, and fixed herself a lair next to them. The boy and the bears played together, he went riding on them about the forest, as if they were horses.

When autumn came the bears had grown to their mother's size and went to hunt for food themselves. The boy was left without playfellows, and began to ride the mother bear. He'd even put his mother on the beast, then he'd jump astride the bear himself and would drive around the forest to his heart's content. Winter came, and with it the cold weather. The woman began to feel homesick and decided to go to her home village; so she put her things together into the basket and started off with her boy; as they walked on, the bears came up after them and refused to leave them. So they put their things on one young bear, the woman sat on the mother bear, the boy on the second young bear, and off they went, riding to the village. When they got out of the forest and approached the village the people saw the bears and were so frightened that they rushed off to hide themselves. The woman rode up to her hut — there wasn't a soul in it. So they got off the bears, took their basket and carried it into the hut. Meanwhile, the bears sniffed around a bit and trotted off to the forest. Little by little the people began to come back to the village; they were surprised, indeed, to see the young woman back and such a handsome youngster with her.

So she lived with her son in her hut, going about her business quietly. Meanwhile her boy, grew very quickly, became a fine young man who spent a lot of time at the smithy of the village and very soon became an excellent blacksmith. The king's servants got to hear about him, and although quite a few years had elapsed since babies were being killed, and now there was quite enough food for all, still those servants said, that this Blacksmith should be killed, for he was born when all babies were killed by order of the tsar. It was the mother's fault, they said, that she had given birth to the boy and deceived the servants

by hiding herself with the baby. Finally it was decided that the Blacksmith, for so he was now called by everyone, should be killed. The poor mother heard this unpleasant news and began to weep, to wring her hands, to tear at her hair. All the village heard her cries of despair. The Blacksmith, however, paid no attention to all this, he just laughed and sang as usual, trying to quiet his mother's fears.

However, when he heard the noise made by the tzar's servants and soldiers that were coming to destroy him, he made himself a club weighing some ten poods, threw it to the sky and set his knee to break its fall. Well, the club struck his knee and bent into an arc. So he added some more iron and forged himself a forty pood club, threw it up, put his knee forward to break its fall and waited for it to come back to him. Some time after midday he heard a thundering in the sky, which meant that the club was coming down, but only when the sun began to set a speck appeared aloft and he put out his knee to break its fall. The club only bent a wee bit at the handle, so he straightened it out, put it behind his belt and went off to look for a horse. That was not an easy matter, for whatever horse he put his hand on, would straight away fall to its knees. At last he saw a man riding a bony mare along the road. He stopped the man, put his hand on the mare — it didn't even wince. Then he put his club on its back and it only moved its ears. The Blacksmith started begging the man to sell him the mare. The man saw that the Blacksmith was very anxious to get it and sold it to him for one hundred roubles—he'd surely never seen such an amount of money, so when he got it he went off ever so pleased, while the Blacksmith mounted his mare and rode away to meet the tzar's servants and the soldiers. When he met them they all cried:

"Turn aside, turn aside! "

"No, you great warriors! I won't turn aside, but you shall! "

They went for him, but the Blacksmith caught one by the forelock, swung him around, and all the soldiers fell flat on the ground. The others saw how things stood and thought it safer to turn and flee. The Blacksmith continued quietly on his way until he came up to a great mountain that stood in his way. He got off his mare, let her free to graze and lay down to rest, pillowing his head on his club. He dozed off and did not hear how a pack of twelve wolves attacked his mare and were on the verge of tearing it to pieces. The mare neighed, calling to the Blacksmith for help. He started, grabbed his club and sent it flying right into the middle of the pack of wolves, killing them all with the blow. The club continued its flight, struck the rocky mountain, and made a crack in it. So the Blacksmith got on his mare and went straight into the crack. He got to the middle of the great mountain and the darkness surrounding him seemed to clutch him and force him back. The Blacksmith tore the kerchief that was tied around his head and the sun on his brow glittered so that he could continue his way through the dark crack quite easily.

So he went on and on when, all of a sudden, he saw some feet ahead, a fire burning. He directed his mare at the fire and discovered that it was a diamond glittering. A huge piece, like a good-sized watermelon. It lay there all ablaze and the Blacksmith picked it up and took it with him. Soon, however, he came up against a stone wall — and he had to use his club again to split it open. As he went through he was struck with the sight that arose on the other side of the stone wall. Palaces, palaces all around, such beautiful palaces that he felt dizzy looking at them. The Blacksmith got off his mare, left it to graze, and went to have a closer look at those palaces. He walked along what seemed to be a street that ended in a sort of platform, then to another, and wherever he looked there were palaces and platforms. Each palace had a door that would open on a smaller door and yet on a still smaller door and so on, until it came to the last tiny one at the very end of what looked like a long passage. And they seemed to go on still further, but the eye could not catch them at such a distance. Some platforms were square, others — long and narrow, yet others — circular and so vast that one couldn't see any walls. Some walls were smooth, and seemed to be made of stone, others appeared to be woven out of fog or out of a spring mist, you know, when a new moon comes peeping through it. Some had no walls at all,

just great stout posts, that seemed to reach up to the skies and some seemed to be touching the skies as if they were talking with God himself. There were no windows, the sun never looked into this place, but everything was perfectly clear, one could have seen a needle on the ground.

The Blacksmith walked along this wondrous place, knocking his club on the ground and looking around. After a while he saw that he'd lost his way. He stood still, glanced about him, but couldn't make out where he'd come from and where he was to go. The empty palaces made him uncomfortable and he wished he could get away. So he stood there, thinking, and, as you know, the more one thinks the more one gets mixed up, just like a fly in a spider's web. He stood there and he didn't know what to do next, when, all of a sudden, a mouse appeared, that had just left its hole to get some food for her young ones. It sniffed about, looked around with its bright, beady eyes and saw the Blacksmith standing there. It sat down on its hind legs and looked at him in surprise. The Blacksmith smiled at the silly little beast and trod on its tail. The poor creature tried to pull away, but the tail was held very firmly. So it began to beg the Blacksmith to let it go, it even promised to help him if he happened to be in trouble some time. He smiled wryly at the idea of the mouse helping him, the most powerful man among the strongest, but let go of its tail and it dived into its hole. He then went on to another platform and suddenly heard the neighing of his mare, seemingly calling to him for help. He started at a run to where the neighing came from but couldn't get out of the palaces; running about he got more lost than ever and noticed that he was going in circles. The mare neighed for a while, then stopped. Seemingly the wolves must have got it. He was awfully upset about his mare, but what could he do? There was simply no way of getting out of the place. So he took up his club and began hitting at the walls, until they were all destroyed to dust. With great difficulty he got to the place where he'd started from, but his mare wasn't there any longer. He stood there, thinking what to do next, when the mouse he'd let go came running to him. It wagged its tail and said:

"I know where you'll find your mare. Come with me and I'll show you. It's been killed by the wolves."

The Blacksmith followed the mouse; when they came up to the place there were only the remains of the mare lying there; its bowels were all let out and in their place a spider had woven his web and was waiting for a fly or a bee to get caught in it. The Blacksmith was so terribly sorry for his little mare that he was about to cry. He sat there, next to it, looking at the ants that had begun to eat its eyes out when a bee buzzed over him and got caught in the web. The more it buzzed and worked at the web with its wings and tiny feet, the more it got involved in the deadly trap. The spider went at it and began tearing up the unfortunate creature.

The bee began to shriek with pain and the Blacksmith jumped to its rescue. He caught hold of the monstrous spider by its tail, swung it around and crashed it against an oak-tree; all the brains of the horrid beast fell out. And that was the end of it. The bee began to thank the Blacksmith for saving it and said:

"You've helped me out of trouble; come along with me. I'll show you a stream with live water, so that you can save your mare."

He went after the bee that flew along, buzzing and showing the way. The mouse, in the meantime, had got into his bag and was sitting there, as quiet as a mouse! The bee brought him to a tremendously high mountain: it was so high that he could find nothing to grasp at to climb it. And when he looked up, well, his hat fell off. So the bee told him to get on its back and trudged with him up the mountain. The Blacksmith clutched at the bee with both hands and could only gasp with fright, for he'd never been so high up. So, the bee got him up there and showed him the stream. The live water spouted right out from under a stone as from a pipe. The Blacksmith collected some of it into a flask, drank some from the source and gave the mouse a drink of it. The bee put them both on her back once more and trudged back down the mountain. They'd just begun the descent when a tremendous

whirlwind caught the bee with her two travellers up, twirled and twisted them around and eventually carried the lot of them the devil knew where! The windstorm carried them along at a terrific pace, so much so, that it seemed to the Blacksmith that they stood still and it was everything else that ran at a great gallop the opposite way. Mountains ran past them, deep seas, dense forests and flooded plains, marshes, fields of different colours, poor small huts with no chimneys to them, all these went past him in a kind of wild race. Only the sun stood in its place, never moving; but its brilliant face had become queer, of a bloody colour; its eyes brimmed over with hot tears that fell onto the earth. They fell in torrents, those tears, and nothing could be seen behind the curtain of rain. Then the rain increased and began to beat the bee down to the ground. It flew down as if it was a stone. They were just on the verge of crashing and the Blacksmith thought that when they crashed, the marrow would flow out of their bones. It was then that the bee opened up its wings, gave a loud buzz-z-z and flew against the wind, carrying the Blacksmith with his mouse on its back. It came down in an unknown and far away kingdom; there it carefully deposited the Blacksmith and the mouse and said:

"If you happen to need my help call me; now I'll be off to collect honey for the honeycombs."

Then she went buzz-z-z-z and flew off. The Blacksmith went with the mouse, he himself knew not where. He walked slowly, looking around him, for this was a new country and new people for him. Of course, people are the same all over the world; they live everywhere, they sorrow, they work, they have their worries, and their joys. Some are born, others die. For if nobody died there'd be so many of them that the world wouldn't hold them. Everybody wants to have children, you know, if only to have somebody take care of one when old age approaches, close one's eyes when death comes, pray for one's soul. Well, that kingdom was governed by a czar who had a handsome son and a beautiful daughter. The czar intended to pass his kingdom on to his son and was choosing a brave husband for his daughter. But he couldn't find any young man that he considered would be fit for his daughter. So bridegrooms-to-be came from other kingdoms, but the princess wouldn't give her consent to any of them.

It so happened, that once the princess went to walk about her garden. She was wandering about, picking flowers for a wreath for herself. She wove one, put it on her head and was just going back to the palace when the old witch Baba Yaga, that usually travelled through the air in a mortar, guiding herself along with the help of a broom, appeared no one knew wherefrom, grabbed the princess, pushed her down into the mortar and flew off with her no one knew whereto.

People told the Blacksmith about it and about the king calling to all the heroes and the strongest men of the kingdom, promising the princess' hand to the one who would bring her back, and to make him Head over everybody in the kingdom. The heroes and the strongest men went each his own way all over the world, but no news came of any of them. Meanwhile the young prince chose twelve young fellows, the best and the bravest of his friends, and went off with them into the world to look for his beautiful sister, the princess. There was no news from him for a long, long while, until one of the twelve youths came back and told the sorrowful story about the witch Baba Yaga who'd taken the princess to the sorcerer Old Bones who had, in turn, locked the poor girl up in a stone tower, under seven seals. The prince went there with his men and Old Bones just blew at them and all of them except himself turned to stone. The czar, when he heard this, wept bitterly over his grief, but he just couldn't think of anything to do. The Blacksmith listened, and thought that he would very much like to find and free the princess. As this thought struck him he could think of nothing else afterwards; he could neither eat nor drink and he couldn't sleep a wink. He'd go to bed, pillow his head on his club and would start thinking. So he thought and thought and finally decided to go see the czar, only the trouble was, he didn't know what to say to him. That was natural, for he'd never seen a







*The boy
was left
without playfellows,
and began to ride
the mother bear.
He'd even put his mother on the beast,
then he'd jump
astride the bear
himself
and would drive around the forest
to his heart's content.
Winter came,
and with it
the cold weather.
The woman began to feel homesick
and decided to go to her home village;
so she put her things together
into the bast casket
and started off with her boy;
as they walked on,
the bears came up after them
and refused to leave them.
So they put their things on one young bear,
the woman sat
on the mother bear,
the boy
on the second young bear,
and off they went,
riding to the village.
When they got out of the forest
and approached the village
the people
saw the bears
and were so frightened
that they rushed off to hide themselves.
The woman
rode up to her hut –
there wasn't a soul in it.
So they got off the bears,
took their bast casket
and carried it
into the hut.
Meanwhile,
the bears sniffed around a bit
and trotted off to the forest.
Little by little
the people began
to come back to the village;*

tzar in his life, didn't know even what he'd look like. Once, as he was lying, thinking, his mouse ran up to him and began to tickle him under the nose with its tail.

"Oh! Get away with you! Don't bother me," said the Blacksmith and gathered the mouse into his cupped hand.

The little beast poked its wee nose out of his hand and said:

"Don't be afraid of the czar, he is just a man like you or any other man. Don't fear anything, only take me with you. I'll tell you where to go for I know exactly where to find the princess. You know that locks and keys mean nothing to me, for I can work my way wherever I want to go. The princess is in the palaces where you trod on my tail. Old Bones locked her up there and takes good care that nobody comes to free her from her prison."

The Blacksmith was quite overjoyed to hear all this. He put the mouse against his breast and went to see the czar. When he finally got to the czar's presence he was so frightened that he lost the power of speech. It was the mouse that brought him to his senses, for it started scratching his breast and whispering to him. The Blacksmith heard what the little beast said and repeated it, word for word, to the czar, just as he would've spoken to his own brother. The czar, of course, listened carefully to everything he said and ordered his servants to give him his very best horse. As it had happened once already, the Blacksmith couldn't find any horse to suit him, because none of them could stand up under his hand, and fell to their knees. At last the czar ordered the servants to give the Blacksmith his own horse, but the mouse whispered that he should ask for the horse the princess used to ride. Well, of course the czar didn't like that very much, but still, he agreed to give the princess' horse. The Blacksmith got on its back, tied his club to the saddle, hid his mouse against his breast and rode off into the wide, wide world.

Darkness overtook them in a big, dense forest. The Blacksmith tied his horse to an oak, made a fire, roasted some bacon and then lay down to sleep. He never heard the mouse, who was in earnest conversation with the horse. The mouse was explaining to it the whereabouts of the princess and told it to gallop to her during the night and bring some news from her. The horse was eager enough to go and see its mistress, but it was tied fast to the oak tree. So the mouse climbed up the tree and gnawed the bridle right through. The horse set off at such speed that even a bird wouldn't have been able to catch up with it. When it came to the mountain where Old Bones' palaces stood, it began to beat its hooves against the stone mountain. All its efforts seemed in vain, however, for although the mountain seemed to tremble from the blows of the hooves, it stood all of a piece, as unapproachable as ever. The horse saw that it got nowhere beating its hooves about, so it galloped off to search for a gap, or a crack in the stone. We all know that there's always a crack that can be found in practically everything, one only has to look for it. So when the horse ran around the side of the mountain it came to the crack made in it by the Blacksmith, when he hit the mountain with his club. The horse galloped through the crack straight to the palaces, thundering with its hooves as it went. Old Bones heard the noise got into the mortar with the witch Baba Yaga, and flew with her to where the noise came from. When the horse saw them, it began using its hooves against them, but Old Bones grabbed an iron bar and hit the horse on the head with it. That was the end of the poor beast. Old Bones grinned evilly, made a kind of a joyful neighing noise, turned back and flew off with his horrid companion to see how his palaces were faring.

As they went along they saw that someone had been there before them, for the doors were open and there was a fairly large crack in the mountain. Old Bones began right away to fix up the crack, breaking rocks and throwing them into the crack to fill it up. Well, he worked away and didn't even notice that daybreak had come to replace the darkness of night.

Now, when our friend the Blacksmith awoke in the forest and looked around, to his horror he saw that his horse had disappeared. The mouse, of course, kept as silent as a mouse would, in fact it clapped its teeth together ever so hard, and kept its mouth shut,

for it was mortally afraid the Blacksmith would kill it in his wrath. But what could he do, poor man? He grieved a while for the horse, put the mouse against his breast, for warmth, and set off on foot. But as you know, it is mighty hard to keep straight in a dense forest, and very soon he saw that he was going in circles. He sat down on a felled tree and began to think — what next? He suddenly remembered the friendly bee that had told him to call it, if he was in trouble. So he called for it to come and help him. The bee heard him and was quick to come. It took the Blacksmith onto its back and flew with him to where the remains of his dead mare lay, in the forest near the mountain. When he saw his little mare, the Blacksmith wept with grief. He got the flask of live water from his bag and began to sprinkle it over the skeleton of the mare. And lo! little by little flesh, and hide, and hair began to cover the bones and the mare lay there all but breathing. So he sprinkled some more of the water over it, and the mare quivered and stood up. The Blacksmith thanked the bee warmly for its help, mounted on the mare and they started off, the mouse showing them the way.

Once again he stood facing the mountain, near the crack he had made in it. He spurred the mare and they went into the crack, with some difficulty, for Old Bones had filled it up with rocks and stones. So he took his club, and began to break through the heaps of stone lying there. Old Bones heard all this noise, understood that things were beginning to look troublesome, and turned to meet the invaders. He met the Blacksmith and they began to fight. They fought till the mountain crumbled, the palaces were destroyed but neither seemed able to overcome the other. Old Bones looked around and saw that the Blacksmith had destroyed his mortar and his broom and was on the verge of banging Baba Yaga with his club; so he thought it best to flee, with the witch riding piggy-back on him. When the Blacksmith saw them fleeing he didn't run after but rode straight to the palaces to look for the princess.

He rode on and on, the mouse showing him the way, and suddenly he saw his horse lying on the way. He got off his mare, got his flask of live water from his bag and sprinkled the dead horse with it. The animal immediately came alive, stood up and neighed joyfully. Old Bones heard it neighing and guessed that the Blacksmith was looking for the princess, who was under seven seals in one of the palaces and he immediately blew such a terrific darkness onto the palaces, that nobody could see a thing there. The Blacksmith quickly tore the kerchief off his head, allowing the sun that shone on his brow to light the way, and they went on.

When they approached the palace in which the princess was imprisoned, they saw that all the doors were locked and stones were piled up in front of them. The Blacksmith dismounted from his mare and began to throw away the stones and soon saw that the iron doors behind these heaps of stone were tremendously thick and had seven seals to each. What could he do? He thought and thought and finally decided to send the mouse to look for the princess. The mouse ran off; as you know, a mouse will always find a crack somewhere and manage to squeeze in. After a while it came back very upset and said that the witch Baba Yaga had frozen the princess. The Blacksmith got right furious with the news, grabbed his club and began to bang at the wall. He banged a couple of times and the wall fell to dust. He dashed in and saw that the prince, the princess' brother, together with his eleven friends, were lying there; they looked alive, but, unfortunately they were turned to stone.

The Blacksmith just looked at them sorrowfully, before rushing on to the rescue of the princess. When he went into the girl's rooms he found that everything was pure ice in them. He saw four posts, all hoary-frosted, under them an icy bed, the curtains around it seemingly woven of thin threads of ice. The princess was lying on the bed, quite transparent, only powdered with hoar-frost. The Blacksmith glanced once at the princess and was so overcome by her beauty that he couldn't take his eyes off her. There he stood stock still, the sun on his brow shining and warming the princess. And suddenly little by little, she began to thaw, the ice first turning white, then darkening. In a while she lay

there, seemingly alive, but not breathing yet. The Blacksmith took out his magic flask with the live water in it, sprinkled some over the princess; she started, then opened her eyes and arose from her bed. The ice began to melt in all the chambers of the palace, the princess got dressed, mounted her horse and they rode off to where her brother lay stiff and cold with his eleven companions. The princess began to weep bitterly at the sight, and the Blacksmith looked sorrowfully at her and didn't know how to help. However, the sun that glowed in his brow began little by little to soften the strong hardness of their bodies and, after a while the twelve lay there, like human beings. The Blacksmith then got his little flask out and sprinkled them all with live water. You can imagine the joy that mingled now with the tears! They left the awful palace and got on the road and then into the forest. And here they heard Old Bones coming after them, raising a storm, crushing and breaking bushes and trees on his way. The Blacksmith stepped out to meet him, and when Old Bones threw himself at him, the young man hit him with his club, cracking his head with the blow. Still, they continued to fight, because Old Bones wasn't one to die easily, you know! They fought for a long, long while; wherever they stood during their struggle — deep lakes surged, that can still be seen in the forest to this day. At last the Blacksmith caught Old Bones in a hug and threw him down; he stepped on his throat and lifted his club to smash the sorcerer's head, but Old Bones started begging not to hit him. He even promised never to do any harm any more and said he'd go and live in the marshes for ever. The young man let him go and they all hurried to the tzar, to make him happy, for, after all his sufferings, he'd get back his daughter and his son.

When they arrived the tzar ordered a feast for the whole kingdom, gave his daughter in marriage to the Blacksmith and made him the Head over all the Heads of the kingdom.

Well, now, the Blacksmith began to live happily in that kingdom. Only the mouse remained always against his breast and if he did good, it sat quietly, but if he did wrong, then it began to scratch at his breast, and seemed at times to pull at his heartstrings with its tiny sharp claws. It must be said that the Blacksmith lived long and did much good in that kingdom. People remember him up to our days, for up to his death he forged iron and taught others to forge, too. He used to say that a blacksmith's arm is always up to its elbow in gold. It is from that time, long ago past, that people began to forge iron and make everything they needed themselves.

However, while both he and his lovely wife lived very happily there, the Blacksmith never forgot his home country. And the day came when he felt so home-sick, that he lost the joy of living. He walked around with a terribly unhappy expression on his face and wouldn't answer to her questions as to what ailed him, until once he said that he wanted badly to see his mother, to have a look at his village. His wife began to beg him to take her, too; she wanted to see his mother, too, she said. So he fixed his things up for the journey and went off with his wife.

They journeyed long and were pretty tired when they finally got to the village where his mother lived. Surely, she had become quite old, smaller than she used to be, and all dried up, the poor soul. She was always weeping for her son, and kept on saying that she wanted to see him before she died. When the Blacksmith finally arrived and found her in their old hut, he lifted her up in his powerful arms, hugged and kissed her, and wouldn't let her go. The mother was terribly happy, but, as is the case with all mothers, she couldn't say a word to him, she wept so! Well, the Blacksmith visited the villagers, remained some time there, taught the people how to forge iron and make the things they needed, then took his mother and went back with his wife, to the country where all the people work, help one another, and never have any trouble.

Maybe all of this is true, and there is such a place with kind, intelligent people, and again, maybe it isn't, and will only come about in the not too far off future, I s'pose we'll live and see, if we happen to live that long.

Ivan Byelarasseiski

Once upon a time, in a far-away country, there lived a king, who was given the surname of Byelarasseiski. He himself was called Ivan and his son was Ivan, too. They lived together, the father ruling the country, the boy running about in search of wonderful things and seldom finding anything that would catch his attention. One day, however, he went about the country-side and saw a muzhik in the field, busy ploughing. His mare wasn't much to look at, but it had a fine little foal by its side. The foal caught Ivan's eye and he began to beg the muzhik:

"Sell me the foal, muzhik, won't you?"

"Dear me, I'm happy that I've got it, at last! I don't want to sell it."

"Do sell it to me! I'll give you coins a plenty!"

"How much'll you give me?"

"Well, how much? Maybe one hundred rubles?"

The poor muzhik'd had a ruble or so at times and considered it big money, but a hundred rubles — well, he didn't even understand what they might mean. However, he thought a bit then said:

"Ah! I'll sell the foal, and get along somehow!"

"Why, you'll be able to buy at least four fine horses with the money, or, if you buy two, you'll have enough left over to fix up your hut and get all kind of things you may need!"

So, finally, the muzhik gave the foal to Ivan, who bridled it, so that, if the mare should neigh, he could curb it and keep it in hand. When he brought it home he put it in the stable, in a separate stall. That night, Ivan's father had a dream about his son buying a foal; he dreamed that this foal would bring joy to the boy, and grief to him, his father.

When he got up he began to turn the dream over in his mind, for he believed in dreams. He decided to look up his dream-book to see what it said there about such dreams. He read the dream-book carefully and decided that the dream was not a good one for him. So he thought a while and then thought: "Maybe I'll take him, while he is still small, and get rid of him, maybe I'll drown him, even if I do feel sorry for him!"

When day came he called his son and said:

"Come hither, Ivan, I want to tell thee something!"

"What do you want to tell me, Father?"

"Let's go the two of us to the sea and I'll show thee the borders of our kingdom there, for thou art young yet, and I'm old, and it may well be that I'll die soon and thou wilt have troubles!"

"All right, Father! Let's go!"

It wasn't so much the border of his country that interested him, but the possibility to run about some. Well, off they went, and Ivan began to think that something was wrong with his father. He kept his eyes fixed on the ground, wouldn't look anywhere. Meanwhile, the boy started running about — he'd go one way and then another, to see if he could find something interesting. At last he ran up to an apple-tree with apples on it. He took up a stick and began knocking down the apples. The apple-tree said:

"Ivanka, Ivanka, little prince! Don't knock my apples down! But see; I have a lot of dry twigs and they worry me; break them off, make two bundles of them and tie one under each arm; the nights are dark, and they might be useful to you."

He did as he was bid, made up two bundles with the dry twigs, and tied them under his arms. Then he ran after his father, who was getting quite angry by this time.

"Why dostn't thou walk quietly after me, instead of running hither and thither all the time?"

"I found an apple-tree and knocked some apples down, Father!"

"All right, then, just walk on a bit faster!"

After a while they reached the deep blue sea:

"Here we are, now; look sharp, there's our border, right t-h-e-r-e, right t-h-e-r-e, where you see the white stone! "

"Where? I don't seem to see anything," said the boy.

"But right there, just come nearer! "

There was no stone, there was nothing to be seen in the sea; however, the boy came closer up to the water and bent lower to see better. The father then came up from behind him and pushed him right into the sea. The deed done, he turned around and ran away as fast as he could, just in case the boy'd cry and he'd feel sorry for him.

When the young prince fell into the sea a great big fish gobbled him up, whole. Inside the fish he made himself comfortable and smoked a cigarette (for he smoked already, and even had matches about him); well, he looked around a bit, remembered that he had two bundles of dry twigs from the apple-tree, so he laid out a small fire, took out a knife he always carried about him, cut some pieces off the fish's insides, baked them and ate them. The fish carried him about for a day or two, then couldn't stand it any longer — the heat in its insides was too great — so it coughed hard and spat the boy out. He came out naked for all he had on had rotted away. So there he sat, all naked, on the beach and thought: "Where am I to go? What am I to do? If I go home, Father will either drown me, or whip me to death, or hang me; I'll just go where my feet take me" Then, after a while, he decided: "I'll go to the highway; there are more people there, walking or sitting along the road; maybe one of them will take me along". So he went to the highway and sat down on the side of it, waited for a while, but nobody either walked or rode there. He thought: "I'll wait just a little while longer, then I'll go on". And suddenly he heard somebody driving along the highway, and, lo and behold, a carriage appeared. But then he was ashamed to go out onto the road, for he was all naked!

"No, I'll let them pass, I'll hide, for this must be either a landlord or a king."

So he jumped off the road and hid under a bush. However, a dog that was running after the carriage smelt him, took the scent and followed his tracks. It ran up to Ivan, who was sitting under the bush, and began barking at him. It happened to be a king travelling in that carriage, and he guessed by his dog's bark that the animal had found something. So he said to his lackey:

"Stop," he said, "just go and see why that dog is barking so; there must be someone there."

The lackey got off and went to see, and found a naked boy sitting under the bush. He went back and told the king:

"There's a naked boy sitting there."

"Whether naked or dressed, never you mind, just bring him here! "

The lackey went to fetch him and brought him to the king; the king asked:

"What's your name, boy? "

"My name? My name is Ivan, and my Father's name is Ivan, also."

"And what else are you called? "

"I'm a prince."

"Dear me," said the king to his coachman, "this must be my son, he looks exactly like my son. How did you come here? "

"Well, really. I don't quite know myself who brought me here and why," lied the boy.

"All right, whether he is, or he isn't my son, I'll take him home."

He wrapped the boy up in something, put him into his carriage and took him along. When they passed a small place where there was a shop the king bought him some clothes and then they went straight home. There the king found his own son waiting for him. When he put Ivan next to him it was impossible to tell the difference — so alike they were!

"Let him be," he said, "let him live here — one of them will be my own son and the other my founding."

So they lived together, the two of them, as like as two peas in a pod; they lived and played, and quarrelled sometimes, as children will, and called each other brother: one was the "own" brother, the other — the "foundling" brother. They grew up to be fine, strong youths and the king was becoming old. You know, a story is told much quicker than what happens in real life. And a day came when the king felt he was really quite old. He called his sons and said:

"Now, children, listen to what I'll tell you: one of you is my own son, the other is my foundling son. I'll divide my kingdom evenly between you so that you may live peacefully and happily after my death, and remember me often with kind thoughts."

He lived a bit longer, then he died. He left half the kingdom to each and the two young princes lived happily, and often thought kindly of their father. Some time passed and once the foundling said:

"What dost thou think, my own brother about our getting married?"

"I wanted to say that to thee long ago, my foundling brother, I think it's high time for thee to marry."

"No, no, my own brother, thou art the real son of our Father, I'm only the foundling; thou art the one who should get married; I'll act as thy match-maker. I've picked a right nice girl for thee already!"

"All right, let it be me to get married. Where'd thou find the girl thou mentioned?"

"Oh, she's quite far away, in another country, or maybe in ours there's a king, has a daughter. Let's go and ask for her hand, only we'll go, we won't ride or drive. Also, just go around to buy some things!"

"What things?"

"Go, buy some stuff, some plain, grey stuff the muzhiks use for their coats!"

"Goodness gracious! Whatever dost thou want that stuff for, haven't we enough clothes to wear?"

"You see, I want just that kind of stuff!" So he went and bought the grey stuff like the muzhiks use for their coats, and brought it home. They called in a tailor and he made them a peasant's coat and a hat. The foundling put them on and said:

"Right! Now, how does it look?"

"Right, thou sayest? Well it looks real awful! Thou canst not be seen by people in that attire! After all we are princes, how canst thou wear such vile garb?"

"Never mind! Thou, brother of mine'll be the bridegroom, so just dress as well as thy pleasure; I'm only the match-maker, after all!"

He put on the coat and the hat and said:

"Now then, forget that my name is Ivan and don't call me brother, whatever you do! Call me Grey-coated Ivashka, the Match-Maker!"

Well, they went off to find the kingdom where the young princess lived and sent a letter when they were quite near it. The king received the letter in which they wrote that they were coming to ask for the princess's hand, and they came in the name of the prince Byelarasseiski. The two young fellows went through a deep and very dark forest, so deep and dark that it's wellnigh impossible to describe; and lo, in that forest there was a man lying on the ground. He had on quite a lot of clothes: cloth trousers, a warm peasant's cloth coat and a fur cap, — all this was happening in summer, you know — well, he lay there and screamed:

"Oh, how cold it is! Oh, dear, how very cold it is!"

"Listen brother of mine", says the "real" brother, "just go around and have a look at him; there must be something wrong with the man!"

"Mind what thou sayest! Didn't we agree that we were not brothers? Say: 'Do go over there, my match-maker, and find out what is ailing that fellow!'"

"All right! Have it your own way! Just go over to that man, match-maker of mine! Maybe he is in need of help."

Well, the foundling brother went and asked the man:

"For heaven's sake, what's wrong with you? Why are you dressed so warmly in such hot weather? We've only got shirts on our backs and they're wet with sweat! "

"It's different with me," says the man, "I'm warm, or even hot, in winter, not now."

"Suppose you come along with us! Maybe we'd find a way of warming you up a bit."

"All right, I'll come."

He got up and went along with them. After a while — things don't happen quickly, you know, only tales are spun fast — they came to a large field, so very large, it was difficult to believe how large it was! A man was crawling about in the field, collecting all kind of bugs and beetles, frogs and flies and other filth, all of which he immediately ate, and kept on yelling: "I'm hungry! "

You see, he had been thrown out of the village by the muzhiks, for he ate everything there was to eat, and never seemed to have enough. Well, our Grey-coated Ivashka, the Match-Maker, said to his brother:

"Why should I always be the one to go and find things out? Go thou, now! "

So the bridegroom-to-be went to see what was amiss and said:

"There's a man, crawls about, collects everything he finds, eats it and cries 'I'm hungry!' I asked him why he cried that he was hungry, instead of going to the village and eating some food, but he answered:

"I need a mighty lot of bread to fill me up! "

"Well, tell him to come with us, maybe we'll manage to feed him! "

When he was asked, he agreed readily:

"Oh! ah! Of course I'll come! "

So they continued on their way — now there were four of them. A while later they saw a man standing in a lake, up to his beard in water. And the man every now and again would yell:

"Oh! I'm thirsty! Oh! Dear me, how thirsty I am! " Grey-coated Ivashka, the Match-Maker, told his brother to go and see what was ailing the man.

The bridegroom-to-be went to find out why the man kept on screaming and him standing up to his beard in water and howling:

"I'm thirsty! "

"Well, well," said the prince, "what are you yelling for, if you are up to your beard in water? Just bend down a mite, just a wee mite, and you'll drink your fill! "

"Thank you kindly for your advice," said the bearded man "but what'll happen when I do drink my fill, and that means I'll drink up the whole lake? Where'll I get a drink then? "

"Never you mind what'll happen then. Just bend a wee mite down and drink! "

Well, the bearded one bent his head a little, and in one gulp drank all the water up. Only crabs, and fish, and all kind of frogs remained on the bottom of the lake. The other fellow, Eater by name, ran up and swallowed them all quickly enough.

"Well, Drinker! Had your fill? "

"Thank you kindly! But what'll I drink next time? I can't say I haven't had my fill, but I believe I'm still more thirsty! "

"All right, come along with us, maybe we'll manage to quench your thirst somehow! What about you, Eater? Are you full up? "

"If I was, I wouldn't want to move! "

"Well, we'll see what we can manage later. Come on, all of you, with us."

"I'd have gone with you anyhow, even if you didn't ask me to! " said Eater, and all of them went on together. To cut a very long story short, they walked and walked and finally came to the king they were looking for. They introduced themselves and said they'd come to ask for his daughter's hand, and the king answered:

"Come along, come along, I've been waiting for such visitors as you a long time; I'll have the bath-house heated nicely for you all! "

"Oh! That's just what we want after the long journey we had to make to come to you! "

"All right, all right! Just come on a bit faster! "

There were about five versts to walk yet to the bath-house, but they got there quickly enough, for they were anxious for a wash. The bath-house was a cast-iron one and was red-hot when they came to it. It was a bit too hot for all of them, with the exception of Frost, who was quite happy:

"I'll surely warm myself here at last! "

"Well, Frost, be quick about warming yourself, for this is too hot for us! " said Grey-coated Ivashka.

So Frost ran off to get to the bath-house first. As soon as he got inside, he took off his trousers, let loose a good deal of wind and the water in the red-hot bath-house froze stiff. They all ran up to it, began banging the cauldrons about and shouted.

"Now, what d'you know about that! The king wasn't even able to get wood enough in his kingdom to heat the bath-house for us! "

"Well, I never! Some match-makers, aren't they! " was all the king could say.

"If we weren't match-makers we wouldn't have come to you with our business, would we?"

"Maybe you all would like to have something to drink now? "

"Ah! Would we? "

"All right! if you all can drink up all the wine and liquor I have in my palace, and I mean *all*, I'll give my daughter in marriage to you! "

"What shall we do? Ha! Drinker, can you manage? "

"I'll try. Only you drink what's tastier, and leave me all the rest."

Off they went together to the great hall where the king ordered the servants to bring all the wine and liquor out. They drank a bit all of them, while Drinker drank everything up. Eater sat there, waiting for some food to appear. When they'd finished all the drinks they said:

"Well, now, what do you say to that? All of a king, you are, and yet you haven't been able to put out drink enough for five people! "

"Some match-makers! " said the king.

"Well, maybe we're not much as to match-makers, but if we weren't match-makers — surely, we wouldn't've come."

"Maybe you'll want to eat something? "

"Well, we've had a try at washing ourselves, and another at drinking a bit; we might have a try at some food! "

So the king ordered his servants to slaughter all the oxen and cows he had, to hang up great cauldrons to boil in the courtyard, to put the meat of the animals in the cauldrons to cook and to give the match-makers this food. The servants did as they were told, and set up the tables to feed the match-makers. They fed them and fed them but to no avail, for this time Eater said:

"You fellows pick out the tastier bits and I'll account for all the rest, bones and all."

So they managed to eat up everything they were given and, if you remember, they'd already drunk all there was to drink, so they said:

"Well, well, your highest highness! you weren't even able to get enough food together to feed the match-makers! We did eat some, but not what we'd call our fill! "

"Dear me! Of all the match-makers! ..."

"Maybe we're not such wonderful match-makers as you'd like us to be, but if we weren't match-makers — we wouldn't be here! "

"Well, you may just start on your way back now, and then you'll return in time for the wedding festivities! "

So they kissed the king goodbye and started back home. Drinker — when they approached the place where they'd found him — went to see the lake he'd drunk dry, and found it full of water once again.

"Well, friends, thank you for having given me enough to drink this once, at least! "

Then he got into the lake up to his beard once again and began to yell:

"I'm thirsty! Dear me, how thirsty I am."

Then they got to the place where they'd picked up Eater. He left them, saying:

"Thanks, fellows, for having really fed me well once in my life time."

The others went on their way and got to the place where they'd picked up Frost, howling that he was cold.

"Thanks, fellows, for having warmed me up once in my life! "

He walked away, screaming with cold, just as he did when they found him, and the two brothers continued on their way home. They did not spend much time there, however, for they very soon went back for the wedding festivities.

"Only," said the real brother, "take off those terrible-looking clothes, I don't want to be ashamed of you! "

"Ah, why should you be ashamed of your match-maker! "

On their way they began to invite all the kings who lived nearby to go with them to the wedding festivity. All the kings came quite willingly, but when they saw what Grey-coated Ivashka looked like they simply wouldn't go on, for all of them were dressed up. First they thought of hiding him amongst them, then they thought it'd be no good, he'd be noticed anyhow. Finally they took him as he was and kept on talking among themselves about getting rid of him on the way; then, after arguing about leaving him on the way, they threw him out of the carriage. He wasn't much upset by this and just ran after them. Then he thought: "Why should I suffer like that? Dear God, give me a horse, so that I may seem better than all of them taken together". And, believe it or not, God did give him such a fine stallion, that I can't even describe him. Ivashka rode right in front of the carriages and if the kings were ashamed of him before – imagine what they felt like, seeing him dressed as a poor peasant, riding a most wonderful stallion, all covered with silver and gold!

Once more they said:

"Still, the best thing to do is to get rid of him! "

"Listen, highnesses, you've already thrown him out of your carriage once," said the future bridegroom, "we better hide him between us in the carriage, and put the stallion with our horses. They'll look much better with such a beautiful animal among them! "

So they heeded to the future bridegroom, took Ivashka with them and put his stallion among the other horses. And they drove on until they were nearly there, then they sent a letter to the king, the father of the bride. In it they asked him to send out horses for the bridegroom, for there was still a lot to go, and their horses were somewhat tired. Then they stopped at a small village and Ivan saw a blacksmith there and asked them to wait for him, for he needed something.

"Goodday to you," he said, addressing the blacksmith.

"Goodday to you, Grey-coated Ivashka," answered the blacksmith.

"I need your help, friend! I want you to make me a bridle, weighing some twelve poods at least! "

"Now! What do you want such a bridle for? "

"What's that to you? I need it, you don't have to know what for, and I won't tell you, either! "

"Eh-he," his fellow-travellers begin to whisper among themselves "the fellow is surely somebody! We thought he was just nothing, but he sure is somebody! "

Then they travelled on. The blacksmith forged the bridle and Ivan paid what he asked for it. They went on and lo! just at some distance from the blacksmith's they saw the mare the king had sent for the future bridegroom. Well, that certainly was some mare, I'll tell you, it'd have knocked the bridegroom-to-be about and pulled him to pieces till one wouldn't have been able to collect all of him together. It came at a gallop, neighing its head off. Well, the bridegroom wanted to mount it, but Ivan stopped him:

"No, my own brother, don't mount that beast, let me get on it and break it in, first! "

He got on his own stallion and went straight at the mare. The mare stopped short and gave a sharp whistle straight into the stallion's nostrils. The stallion fell down on the ground and Grey-coated Ivashka jumped over onto the mare's back, bridled it with his twelve poods bridle and off they went, the mare trying to throw the horseman, the horseman curbing it with all his might, until it went clean up into the air, practically reaching the clouds. The "real" brother thought: "Well, that's the end of him." But by and by Grey-coated Ivashka broke the mare in so well, that it fell on the ground and wouldn't move. So they continued their journey on their own horses and soon got to the king's palace.

"Well, we can only thank you, our future father-in-law, to have sent such a mild heron for our bridegroom-to-be. It was so worn out by the time he mounted it, that it could go no further! Difficult to believe there were no stronger ones in your stables! "

"Oh-ho! Some match-makers, I'd say! "

"Maybe we're not such wonderful match-makers as you'd like us to be, but if we weren't match-makers — we wouldn't be here! Now, suppose we start the wedding festivities."

So they began to celebrate immediately. First they wedded the king's daughter to the "real" brother, then the feast started. After that the young wife said:

"Well, Ivanka, husband of mine, let's have a game rolling the ball, let's go to the third floor and play a bit! "

At that, Grey-coated Ivashka, the Match-Maker says to his brother:

"See, here, don't you go anywhere without me, look about for me wherever you go! "

But the young wife chose a moment when the match-maker was nowhere to be seen and again asked her husband to go with her for a game rolling the ball.

They go upstairs to the third floor and she begins the game and sends the ball rolling to him, and cries out:

"Catch it! " However, the ball, which is more like a cannon ball than anything else, rolls bang against the wall and gets stuck there. Fortunately the prince didn't try to catch it, that would've been the end of him. The young wife cries out again:

"Roll it back to me! "

He can't even budge the thing, it's so hard stuck in the wall. Meanwhile Grey-coated Ivashka looks around and doesn't see his brother anywhere, so he starts upstairs at a run and when he sees what they are at, he exclaims:

"Eh! Brother of mine! Don't you see that he is trying his best, but he hasn't got enough strength to go the right way about the game. We don't play it like that in our country! "

"Well, just show us how you play it? " says the bride.

"Just like that! "

And with these words he gives the cannon-ball a frightful kick and it goes right through all the walls of the palace and explodes in the town!

"That's how we play it at home! You see, your husband wasn't quite ready for the game, as you wanted to play it, or he'd have done it even better than I did! "

When they finished celebrating they went back home with the princess. She kept on thinking, about Grey-coated Ivashka:

"You just wait, I'll get you yet! "

By the way, she had a sword weighing some eight poods. When Grey-coated Ivashka lay down in his bed for a good night's sleep, after the wedding feast, he lay down first with his head towards the fire, then when the fire went out, he turned round about and put his feet in the place his head had lain. His brother's wife came stealing into the room and — swi-i-i-sh went the sword, and off came Ivashka's feet (fortunately not his head!). After her deed she disappeared, went and hid somewhere. He did not scream, never uttered a sound, just crawled out of the house onto the highway and there he moaned and screamed

with pain all night long. It so happened that another maimed fellow was passing by — one whose hands had been cut off. Well, he asked:

"Now who is moaning and crying in such anguish there? "

The poor cripple asked in turn:

"Who is it, that goes there? "

"It's me, a maimed, handless man! "

"Good God, you poor maimed fellow; no hands! Well, I'm a cripple with no feet, that seems worse still, doesn't it? "

The maimed one came up to him, looked him over and said:

"Ah-ha! You must be in great pain, poor fellow! "

Then he added:

"Suppose we keep together now? "

"But how can I? I have no feet. You won't be able to carry me! "

"We'll see! Come, try and get a good hold of my neck, you poor cripple! "

And then he stopped short suddenly and asked:

"Where can we go now, we poor unfortunates? "

The crippled one answered:

"I thank my fortune that you came along; at least now I know where to go. We'll head for the darkest and densest part of the forest, that's where we'll go! "

"And what are we going to do there? " said the maimed one.

"We'll rob people — those who pass by."

"Well, that's as good a way as any to get bread, isn't it? "

So they went into the forest and began robbing people of all they carried. Whoever came by, landlord, merchant or Jew, it was all the same for them. They lived through summer, but when autumn came and with it the cold weather, they began to feel chilly. They decided they'd have to make themselves a hut of sorts, and when once a blacksmith came by on his way to the fair, with a cartful of axes, they helped themselves to five each.

"Well, now we'll go back into the forest."

The maimed one carried the cripple to a tree and the cripple felled it with his axe. Then the maimed one carried the cripple to the place they'd chosen to build, and the cripple pulled the felled tree after him. When they'd finished collecting the timber they needed, they built their hut, with a beautiful stove and all, and lived there, warm and happy. They continued to rob the rich people that went by, but when a poor man passed, they'd give him some of their money. Then they found that they were tired of doing all the housework as well as the robbing — they had to bring wood and water, light the stove, cook the meals, and it became harder and harder for them.

"You know what? " said the cripple.

"No! What? " said the maimed one.

"Let's get us a housewife somewhere. Winter is nigh here! "

"Where d'you think we'll get her? "

"You just pick me up and carry me! "

"All right."

It was Christmas time and the villagers were going from one hut to another, singing carols and enjoying themselves. They decided to go into the village when darkness fell.

"We'll go straight up to the pot-house," said the cripple, "for there'll be games and drink there. There'll be plenty of girls, and they'll certainly come out for a breath of air once in a while. Then we'll grab one of them and get her into the forest. She'll never know the way out! "

All this they did, and everything worked out just as the cripple had said. They caught a young girl who'd come out for a breath of air, and carried her off — she never knew where! She was so frightened, she never uttered a single word. Her father was most awfully upset; the mother wept bitterly, for not a soul could tell where she'd gone from

the games in the pot-house. Meanwhile the maimed one and the cripple brought her to their hut in the forest and told her:

"Don't fear us, we'll not harm you, you'll be very happy with us. When merchants or jews will come our way with flour or grain, we'll get it from them and bring it to you here; then you can bake and cook whatever you like for yourself and you'll feed us, too."

Well, now, she lived there a bit, looked about her, thought over what happened. First she felt miserable and even began to lose weight, but then she forgot her grief, began to get plump again, and lived quite happy. A little while passed and then, one night an old woman called on her.

Of course, you can easily guess who the old woman was. Quite right, Baba Yaga herself! She sported an iron leg, travelled by air in an iron mortar and landed at the very door of the little hut. The girl was alone, for both the maimed one and the cripple had gone about their business, robbing merchants, landlords, and jews. The hag knocked at the door and said:

"Let me in, girlie! "

The girl let her in and the old hag told her to comb out her (the hag's) hair with a fine-tooth comb. She put her head in the girl's lap, fixed a small tube to the girl's heart, and began to suck her blood. When she'd had enough she got back into her mortar and whiz-zed off till the following night.

Next night she repeated her visit, once more sucked her fill of the girl's blood and flew off. When the maimed one and the cripple came back after the second night and the girl brought them their food, they were astonished to see how very white and exhausted she was. The cripple said to the maimed one:

"Listen, brother, our girl looks pretty worn out. You haven't been messing about with her, have you? "

"Goodness, no! I was just thinking that maybe you were to blame! "

"Shall we ask her what ails her? "

"Yes, let's do that. Hey, you, girl! What's ailing you that you're so thin and white? "

"Ah! You don't know what's been happening to me", she said and told them what had happened during the two last nights, when the old hag Yaga flew up to the hut in her mortar, and asked to be let in, and how she sucked her blood, while she made the girl comb out her hair!

"Well, well," said the two men, "we'll certainly catch her. We won't go anywhere tonight and we'll catch the horrid old hag! "

When night came they sent the girl to bed and sat there, waiting for the hag Yaga. At about midnight they heard her whiz-z-z in. The girl got up and let her into the hut, the two men got her into her iron mortar and began to pound her in it. They pounded long and hard until she began to beg them:

"Stop a bit you maimed one, and you, cripple. Stop beating me up and pounding me to pulp. I'll tell you something."

"Aha! And what, may we ask, do you want to tell us? "

"Something good! Only let me go! You'll have your hands and feet if you do! "

"Well, well, that's just fine", they said, "then, maybe, we'll let her go? "

So they went off after her, the cripple holding her hard. She brought them to a well and told them to put their arms and legs in the water, they'd get their hands and feet back then.

The maimed one couldn't wait, he was so anxious to get his hands, but the cripple said:

"No, brother, not so fast! "

He broke a leafy branch off a tree and put it into the water. It barely touched it and turned dry and dead.

"Come on brother, she hasn't had enough, has she! "

So they began to beat her again, as hard as anything. Again she begged:

"Stop, you'll have your hands and feet, only stop beating me." And she took them to another well nearby.

The cripple once again told the maimed one to wait, broke a piece off a dry stump, put it in the water and the stump threw out fresh green shoots and small green buds.

"All right, now let's go ahead and try the water ourselves! "

As soon as they got their hands and feet again they cried:

"Let's beat up the old hag now that we've got our feet and hands! "

So they beat her and beat her, until she was more dead than alive, then the former maimed one asked the former cripple whether they'd leave her there, or what?

"No, brother, if we leave her here she'll come too in no time, and start her dirty business all over again."

There were a great many oak stumps about, for people had felled many oak-trees there, so the former cripple went on:

"I know what we'll do! "

"What? "

"We'll take one of those stumps, we'll split it, we'll make some wedges, we'll wind her long hair around the wedges and then fit the wedges into the crack in the stump! "

"Oh! That'll be just what she needs! "

They did all they'd planned, got the old hag safely tied by her hair to the stump, and went home, happy with their hands and feet. The girl asked them:

"Where's the old hag? "

"Don't you worry, she's in a safe place, all right! "

"Well, God willing, I won't see her again, then! but tell me, is she alive or dead? "

"Just a tiny bit alive! "

"Oh dear! Oh dear! She'll surely come to, then! "

"That's impossible. She'll just dry up tied by the hair to that stump, and then she'll die! "

"You just go there and see — she'll be there no longer! "

"Maybe we'd better go at that, to see what she is about! "

So they went there and found no old hag there. She'd pulled out the oak stump with her hair and went off with it.

"Well brother, seems we better go look for her, or we'll be having trouble, too."

So they followed the marks left by the oak stump that the hag had dragged along, and came to a fine stone mansion. They went in and there was a right nice girl standing by the stove, making pancakes. They said:

"Good day to you, pretty one! " and she answered:

"Good day to both of you, handsome fellows! What have you come around for? "

"We're looking for something! "

"Oh! I know! It's you that have practically killed my mother! She's just barely alive after what you did to her! I'll tell you what: If one of you will take me for his wife, I'll show you where my mother is. If you don't, then she'll get her strength back and she'll break all your bones, she'll simply eat you up! "

"All right, you'll marry one of us. Just show us where she is."

"See that cellar there? Well, she's in it! "

Well, they just caught her unawares, jumped on her and simply tore her to pieces. There was a small mound of aspen dry branches in the yard — the house was in the forest, you see, — so they set fire to the dry wood and threw the dead body into the fire; she burnt, and they could be quite sure she'd never come alive again.

They went back to the girl:

"What've you done with my mother? "

"She's dead."

"Well, now I'll go with you! "

"No need for that, you just wait here! "

"No, I'll go with you! "

They said to each other:

"Oh! well, let her come! "

"You know brother," said the former maimed one, "it's about time you were getting married."

"Oh, no, brother, I've got too much to do yet! It's you who should get married, really! I've still got to find out how my own real brother is doing! "

They didn't need to say much to understand each other and left it at that. But then they suddenly remembered:

"See, here, brother, we'll have to return our girl to her father! "

"We'll return her, don't worry! "

They got the money they had out of the casket and gave the girl two or three good handfuls of coins, then told her to go home to her father.

"But I don't know the way back! If I did I'd have run away from you long ago! "

Well, they took her back themselves, thanked the father and went back to their hut to celebrate the wedding of the former maimed one. He said to the former cripple:

"Well, brother, let's divide our money between the two of us! "

"Ah, brother", answered the former cripple, "I don't need anything, I'll just take some coins to start off with. Keep the money, I'll always manage to get some if I need it! "

So they separated, after a warm farewell, wishing each other luck. The former cripple went off to the kingdom where his brother lived. You can well imagine what he felt when he saw his own, real brother, herding swine.

"Why, thou art not herding swine, brother of mine, art thou? "

"Greetings to thee, my founding brother! "

"Well, well, my own brother, thou'st certainly come down in life! "

"It wouldn't be thanks to thee, would it, my founding brother? ! " He seemed to be getting angry.

"Dost thou think I knew aught about this? Let me have a leather whip, do! "

"No, wait; we have to talk things over, first, my founding brother. Where hast thou been all this time? "

"Where? Why, I've been getting myself a pair of feet! "

"Thou talkest nonsense! Thou hast thy feet, I see, same as when we met last! "

"It's because I was able to get myself a new pair. Your dear wife cut mine off. She meant to cut off my head but, thanks to God, got my feet instead. Now, that's about all! Give me that whip, I say! "

"Wait, I want to say something, too. My life is very miserable. Thou knowest only what thou hast seen. See that white sow over there? Well, as soon as I get home that woman says 'Ah-ha, you son of a b...,' so you're back! Belka (that's the sow's name), come here; come on, you son of a b... kiss her ...! "

"Give me that whip, I say! "

"There, take it! But what about me, now? Where shall I go? "

"Go to the blacksmith. Have him make three switches of fine, pliant iron and another three of hard strong iron."

He got the switches and brought them back to the founding brother, who told him to go with them to the bath-house and he went there. Then they changed their clothes, each putting on the other's and the poor herdsman went off to the bath-house. The founding started beating the swine and driving them home. She heard of course, the squeaking of the pigs and came out on the porch to see what was amiss. And she saw him driving and beating the animals.

"Ah-ha," she said, "you son of a b...! What are you trying to do? Just wait, and you'll see what's coming to you! "

"Ah! choke on your pigs, and then, maybe, a wolf will choke on you! How long d'you expect me to herd them? "

"I'll whip you to death, for that! " she said.

"The devil take you! " he answered. "One only dies once! "

She went at him in a fury, but he said:

"Wait! Don't whip me before I have a wash. Better have them heat the bath-house. I'll wash and no one'll have to dirty his hands by touching me; then you'll just bury me quietly."

"Ah! That's an idea. Hey, there! You, girl, go heat the bath-house. Let him wash off his filth! "

So they warmed up the bath-house and he went to have a good wash. He took his time about it and the woman began to lose patience. Then she got real mad, grabbed her sword and rushed after him to the bath-house. Just as she opened the door and ran in, he caught her by her braids and threw her down.

"Ah! dear Lord, send me three fine switches — let them be nice and dry! "

His brother, who was already in the bath-house, threw him the switches. The foundling stood holding her by her hair; he caught the switches and began to whip her. She cried at first, then began to yell at the top of her voice, addressing her husband (or so she thought!).

"Oh, dear me, oh, dear me! My dear love, I'll never do it again, never, never! I'll treat you as you deserve. You'll be king and I'll call you king and tell everyone to call you king! "

"No! these switches are no good, I've broken them already! Dear Lord, send me three more, but let them be better than these! "

He got the remaining three switches from his brother and went on beating the woman, adding:

"This is for the swineherd, this is for the swineherd! And this, for the white sow Belka, for the son of a b... that had to kiss the sow's behind, I've stood it for many years, I won't stand it any longer! "

"Oh, my dear, oh, my beloved! It won't happen again! "

"I don't believe you! "

She was crawling at his feet, kissing them, swearing that she'll never again do anything to hurt him! Well, when he thought she'd really had enough, he let her go. Off she went, limping, moaning, and sobbing, barely able to walk. As soon as she got home she told the servants to get the carriage ready and go to the bath-house "to fetch the king."

Meanwhile, in the bath-house the brothers changed their clothes back again and the foundling hid away while the brother sat down and wondered what to do next. He cried:

"Brother, brother, how shall I remain without thee? "

"Don't worry brother dear, everything will be all right now."

"Stay here and live with me! "

"No, brother dear, I can't, I have to go and see how my father fares. Whether he's alive or not! Well, good luck to thee! "

Then the carriage came to take the king away to his home and he said:

"Well, dear foundling brother go, if you must and be happy! " He went back to his home, as a real king should; everybody obeyed him, and the wife was the first to do everything he asked, to show the others how they should treat him... Meanwhile the foundling brother set out on his way, pretending he was a horse-doctor, a farrier. He'd go to a village and ask:

"Any colts here to be lain and gelded? Or maybe, doctored or shod? " If the answer was:

"No, there aren't any, "he'd go on and on, and so, finally, he came to his own kingdom. He crossed it, stopping in every village:

"No colts to lay and geld? "

"No, good farrier! But our king has one, that's been in his stables some thirty years, and no one has been able to lay it or geld it."

"Why so? "

"Why, because it's not a colt that was bought, but a special one, a bewitched one: whoever lays it will behead the king; if he doesn't lay and geld it, then it's the king who has the farrier's head off and there are already nine heads stuck up on poles! "

"Well, of all the fools! ... What kind of farriers are they that can't geld a colt! "

The muzhiks all answered at once:

"You just try — we are telling you, there are nine poles already there, with nine heads on them; just yours missing! "

"I'll certainly go and try my luck! "

"Listen to him, the braggard! "

He paid no attention to these words and went straight to his palace. His father was sitting there, grey-headed and old.

"Greetings to you, highness! "

"Greetings, good farrier! "

"The muzhiks tell me you have a colt in your stables, that hasn't been gelded? "

"Right! Would you like to try and geld it? "

"I would! "

"Beware! You see there's just one pole left there — it might be the one to hold your head? ! "

"We'll see! "

"If you geld my colt you'll take my head off my shoulders, if you don't — it will be my sword that'll fell yours off your shoulders, and it'll be your head, sticking on the last, free pole! "

"We'll see! " said the farrier and gave a shrill whistle. Well, it reached the stables through the stone walls and iron door. The colt neighed in answer, and the stables split open. The colt broke loose from the chain that held it, galloped straight up to the farrier and neighed with all its might.

"Quiet, my little one, quiet! "

The king got real frightened there, for he saw his end approaching. The farrier just gave the colt a light slap on its hind quarters, the colt stood quite still and he gelded it right there, without even laying it. Then he turned to the king, his father:

"Do you recognize me, highness? Do you know who I am? "

"I don't, I've never seen you! "

"Why, I'm your son! "

"Well, my dear son, you are in the right, I see, and I'm in the wrong. My dream has turned out right, after all! So it's up to you, now to do whatever you wish to me! "

"Father, listen to me. There's never been such a case before and if it might happen in the future — I know naught about it, that a son would behead his own father! "

The father was mighty happy to hear these words and to have got his son back. First he thought he'd been drowned, but now he'd come back to him alive. Overjoyed, the king ordered a great feast for all the people of the kingdom. Everybody came and ate, and drank, and danced. Even I was there; I had wine and I had mead but it all got spilt down my beard — so I tasted none of it!

Ivan and Nastasia

Once upon a time long, long ago, in a certain kingdom, but not in ours, there lived a czar who had three sons: the eldest and the second one were bright fellows, the youngest was a simpleton. Three kingdoms farther away, in the fourth one counting from where the czar lived, there was a princess whose name was Nastasia. She had a garden and in it there were different kinds of fine apples. One day the czar sent his eldest and brightest son to her, for some apples; the young man rode along until he came up to a stone that lay in

his way. Starting from the stone there were three roads; there were letters on the stone, that read as follows: "Go along one road — robbers will kill you, along another — beasts will eat you, along the third — there'll be food for your horse, but none for you". The bright fellow just turned around and went home. The tzar then sent his second son — who acted just like his brother: he reached the stone, stood there a while, read what was written on it and turned back home. Then it was the simpleton who started begging the tzar:

"Pa, let me go now!"

The tzar tried to quiet him:

"Where dost thou think thou wilt go? Two bright fellows came back home from midway and thou, a simpleton, thinkest thou canst reach the apples?"

But the simpleton wouldn't listen to reason and begged and begged. So the father finally gave in, let him have a horse and allowed him to go. When the boy came to the stone and read the letters on it, he chose the third road, where his horse would find food.

He rode all day and then found himself in another kingdom. There he saw a hut standing all by itself, which happened to be the home of Baba Yaga, the one with the bony leg. He asked her to let him spend the night in her hut and she agreed; she was very kind to him, and even exchanged his horse for her own mortar, in which he could fly anywhere he wished, helping himself along with a broom. So he got into the mortar and started on his way.

Another day's journey brought him to a second hut where another Baba Yaga lived. She also let him spend the night in her hut, took the mortar he came in and gave him another. So he went on and after a day's journey on his way to the princess Nastasia, he found yet another hut and a third Baba Yaga in it. She let him pass the night in her hut and was also very kind to him and gave him her own horse to continue his journey. On the fourth day he got to the town where princess Nastasia lived in her palace with a beautiful garden around it.

Well, he got to Nastasia's palace all right, but all and everyone in it had gone to sleep for twelve days. He did not bother to look for doors or gates, but just flew over the walls surrounding the palace. He walked into one room and saw that everybody was fast asleep there. In the next room there was a girl asleep and he thought: "Is that the princess Nastasia? No, it can't be, it must be one of her maids!" You see, he often talked to himself asking questions and answering them, too. In the following room there was another girl fast asleep, and he, likewise, asked himself whether it was the princess, and answered that it must be her most faithful maid. In the third room he saw Nastasia asleep and stood there, struck by her beauty. After a while he lay down next to her, sinned with her in her sleep, and then went into the garden. There he picked three different kind of apples, tied them up in three kerchiefs and then wrote on a piece of wood in the garden: "Prince Ivan Ivanovich's been in this garden, has picked apples and has sinned with princess Nastasia while she was asleep". Then he went up to his horse, but the horse said:

"I can't carry thee out of this town, thou hast sinned too much! We'll both perish here!"

"What, then, am I to do, my faithful friend?"

"What? Well, go to the bath-house and wash away thy sins. Sweat them out, otherwise we won't get out of this place!"

So he went to the bath-house, scrubbed himself as hard as he could, went back to his horse and the horse said:

"Nay! Thou hast washed a bit of thy sins off, but most of them are still stuck all over thee. Go, wash thyself some more and sweat as much as thou canst, they'll go from thee in sweat."

So he went to wash his sins off a second time and then went back to his horse. The horse looked him over and said:

"Thou hast got rid of two thirds of your sins; go and wash the remaining third away! If thou wilt manage to wash it off — we'll get out of here. If not, we'll both perish!"

So Ivan went to wash his remaining sins off a third time. He scrubbed himself and he sweated, he scrubbed himself and he sweated out his sins and then went back to his horse:

"Well, now," said the horse, "it's better this time; you've practically washed yourself clean, but not quite. We'll be able to get out of the garden and out of town, and only one hair of my tail will get caught in jumping over the walls of the fortress but that will be enough to awaken the whole town."

Ivan then mounted his steed, took his apples and they sped away. When one hair of his horse's tail touched the walls of the fortress, the whole town shook and clattered with a terrible noise and everybody awoke. And they all asked one another what the matter was, and why was there such a terrific alarm?

They all ran about, saw that the rooms were open, that somebody had been in the garden. The princess also ran into the garden, saw the words he'd written on the piece of wood, and rushed away after him. She ran ever so fast, but was unable to catch him. She just cried in a loud voice.

"Prince Ivan Ivanovitch! Expect me in twelve years time; I'll come to visit you."

Meanwhile Ivan went on his way home. He didn't stop at the last two huts, but rode straight to the first hut, left the horse there and took his own back, and went on. He was already in his kingdom, nearing home, when he felt terribly sleepy; he thought: "I'm nearly at home here, I have naught to fear, I'll just lie down and sleep a mite."

He went to sleep as soon as he lay down, and his horse went to look for fresh grass. Just then his two elder brothers appeared on horseback. They'd been hunting and they came across their sleeping brother of a sudden. They saw the three kerchiefs with the apples tied in them, and understood right away that he'd got the apples their father'd asked for and was taking them to him. They weren't very good people, those two brothers; they began to argue with each other about what they should do with Ivan and the apples, for their father would get angry with them and would certainly give half of his kingdom to their youngest brother. One of them said:

"We'd better get rid of him for good, and take those apples to our father ourselves. Let's kill him."

The other answered:

"Nay, we can't do that; we can't kill him, for it would do us harm; let's, rather, blind him."

So they blinded him — pricked his eyes out. Then they took the apples and left him there. When he awoke — there was no horse, no apples, there was nothing, for he could not see.

However, he went on, blind though he was, and after a while came up to a river. Next to it he stumbled on a small boat, turned down side up, and got under it, for he thought "whoever'll come for the boat will find me!"

He lay there quietly, waiting, when of a sudden he heard three evil spirits getting out of the water. They got up on the boat, sat on it and began to talk. Ivan, of course, heard everything they said:

"Look, brothers, that's wonderful dew lying on the ground today; I tell you, if a blind man were to wash his eyes with it — he'd surely see again right away!" said the first. The second said:

"That's nothing. Listen to what I'll tell you. There's a kingdom nearby that has no water at all. They have to get it in other kingdoms.

Well, if they only but knew, they'd weave a rope out of raw pieces of bast; right next to their gates there's a big bush. If they got twelve pairs of oxen harnessed together and tied them to the bush, they'd pull it out with all its roots and water would gush from under the earth, and they'd have a sea of water there!"

The third one says:

"I've heard about such and such a kingdom where a young princess lives that's been very sick indeed these past three years — she's just skin and bones, that's how sick she's

been. And yet, it's quite easy to help her: she went to Holy Communion one Sunday morning and she kept a tiny piece of it under her pillow, wrapped up in a piece of material. Now, a rat nibbled the material through, and that tiny piece fell through a crack in the floor, under the base of her bed. A toad found it and ate it up. Now it's grown as fat as a cow, it lies under the base of the bed; nobody can see it. The princess, in the meantime, is just a bag of bones, poor thing. Now this is how she can be helped: if anyone would lift the base on which the bed stands, and cut the toad open, and wrap the princess into its skin, she'd be even better than she'd ever been before! "

After they'd had their chat, the three evil ones went headlong back into the river – plop-plop-plop, and nobody could say what they were like, where they came from and what business brought them to the shore. Ivan still sat under the boat, quite blind.

When he heard them plopping back into the river he waited a while, then got out from his hiding place. Then he went down on his knees in the grass, passed his hand over it several times until he got it nice and wet with dew, then he rubbed his eyes with it and saw everything around him once again even better than before, that's how wonderful the dew was.

After curing his eyes, the young prince decided to go to the waterless kingdom, to see what he could do about the bush there. When he got there, he said:

"I heard you need water, badly; I'll give you water! "

He told them to prepare a strong rope woven of raw bast, ordered twelve pairs of oxen, first rate oxen they should be, then he told them to harness up those oxen, tie them with the bast rope to the bush that grew near the gates, and, once everything was ready they all gave a great shout and the oxen pulled out the bush. Well, the bush was out and the water spouted out, ran down the hill and through all the kingdom. They tried to reward him for what he'd done, but Ivan Ivanovitch refused everything and left their kingdom right away and went to the kingdom where the sick princess lay.

When he got there he immediately told everyone that he'd come to cure the princess, who – he had heard – had been ailing for many years.

They put him into a carriage and drove him to the palace. Then they took him to the princess – she lay there, just a sack of bones. He ordered the servants to lift the base on which her bed stood, and everybody saw the huge toad lying there. He told them to cut it in two; it let out all the wind right away. Then the naked princess was wrapped up in the skin. Within three days the skin disappeared – whether it dissolved or grew into the princess' skin one could not tell, but the princess was cured and became more beautiful than she'd ever been before. They all wanted to give him gifts and insisted that he should marry the princess and take half of the kingdom, but he said:

"I don't need anything like that. I've got my own wife that'll come to visit me! "

And right after he cured the princess he returned to his father.

When he came to his father's kingdom nobody, not even his father could recognize him, so he had to go to work as one of his father's servants, for his brothers had made their father believe that he was lost or even dead, maybe. Wherever Ivan was put to work he'd do everything the wrong way – in fact he did more harm than good with his toil. He was very strong, so finally they set him to bring wood for the brewery. He'd take up a huge quantity in one go, throw it on the ground and would sit down to rest and wouldn't do a thing more! They seemed to have trouble with him all along.

There came a day, after twelve years had gone by since he'd been in princess Nastasia's bedroom, that she came up with her son and her soldiers to their kingdom, and they took up their stand on the other side of the river. Her son cried out:

"I want Ivan Ivanovitch, my father, to come out and welcome me. If he doesn't, I'll destroy everything I see around me, so you better find him and send him along! "

The czar sent the eldest son – the one who blinded his own brother, (remember?) to meet the young boy. The prince went towards the youngster, who cried out:

"There comes my uncle, the one who blinded my father."

He took hold of his uncle's hand, twirled him around, and sent him flying — nobody saw whereto. And the youngster cried out again:

"My father is to come out to meet me. I'll lay out each and everyone that comes instead of him! "

The king didn't know what to do and sent the other son out. The young fellow cried out:

"There goes my uncle, who pricked my father's eyes out! I don't want him", he cried, "give me my father, the one who took the apples from our garden! "

Now, the czar really got frightened:

"Where'll I find him? " and began asking all his servants:

"What'll I do? "

Ivan came out then, and said, "I'll help you out! "

"Take whatever you want, just help me out of this! " said the czar.

Ivan went and got himself all muddy and dirty in the neighbouring marsh, then went to where the money was kept and filled his pockets with coins — the czar told him to take all he wanted. Then he crossed the bridge over the river.

He went along towards Nastasia's soldiery and threw them handfulls of coins. Of course, the soldiers were just as happy as anything, and grabbed the coins, and bowed low to Ivan.

"There," said the youngster, "that's my Father, all right. Whatever it is thou lookest like, thou art my Father! "

He went over to Nastasia, took her hand in his and went with her to his father; the soldiers came after them. And he remained king of that kingdom, and ruled it, instead of his father!

A Story About the Turner and the Goldsmith

Once upon a time there lived a Turner and a Goldsmith, who met at a pot-house and began to drink. They'd had quite a lot of drink each when the Turner said:

"I'm the better master of the two! "

The Goldsmith said:

"Nay, I'm better than you! "

So they went on, arguing and finally began to fight. They had quite a decent fight and as they fought in the central town of the kingdom they decided:

"Let's go see the king and ask him to judge us."

They went to the king and the king asked them:

"And who may you be? "

One of them said:

"I'm a goldsmith."

The other said:

"I'm a turner."

"What do you want? "

"Well, we want this, and that, and the other! "

"I see," said the king. "I'll tell you what. I'll give you both two days for each one of you to make something wonderful. I'll judge your work carefully and decide who is the best master of the two." They went home and the goldsmith, after much thought, made a gold fish that could be let out into the water and would swim as if it were alive. If you wound it one way it would swim on top of the water, if the other way — it would go to the bottom.

When they came to the king he made the servants pour water into a bowl and let the fish into it. It started swimming just as if it were alive.

The turner wound his work up — a dove, just ready to fly off.

"Well," says the king, "let's go outside and see your work there."

While the king was getting dressed his young son caught the dove up in his hands, ran out into the yard with it and began to wind it, holding it by one of the bird's feet.

He wound it up pretty hard and the dove went up and up with the boy, and first he was a small speck against the sky, then he disappeared altogether.

All those who saw this began to scream at the top of their voices, the king stopped judging the works of the turner and the goldsmith and rushed out into the yard. Unfortunately, the boy was nowhere to be seen.

Meanwhile the dove flew farther and farther, and only on the third day of its flight the youth understood that he should unwind the dove himself.

As soon as he began unwinding the bird, he came down near a house quite unknown to him and stood there, quite at a loss, as to what he should do.

Those were the early hours of the morning and he stood there, hungry and cold, crying and sniffing, when a merchant passed by, saw him, began to put questions to him in an unknown language, until at last he was able to make himself understood. He asked the boy:

"Where are you from?"

The boy answered:

"I don't know."

The merchant took him home, gave him food and drink and the boy remained in his house. The man saw that the boy was very smart so he taught him a bit to read and to write, then made him assistant in his business, where he sold all kind of things.

There were fiddles there, and other instruments; he learnt how to play the fiddle so well that all the people around the place came to listen and—my dear goodness, how they bought things there!

There was a king in the country the boy came to in his flight, also; this king once decided to give a ball and asked whether anybody knew a good musician, and they told him that a merchant in that town had a musician.

The king sent his lackey for the youth and when they were on the way the youth saw in the vicinity of the king's palace a six-storeyed tower. He began questioning the lackey about it:

"What's that? Who lives there?"

The lackey said:

"The princess lives at the very top of the tower."

"What does she live there for?"

"You see, young master, when she was born, the midwife that assisted her mother in childbirth said that she'd be a naughty, worthless wench when she grew up and the king, fearing that she might do wrong foolishly, had this tower built; she's been locked in there, for over twelve years, with only an old woman that brings her food and teaches her a few things she needs to know, and there's guard, standing all around the tower, in case the old woman might let someone in."

The youth never said a word to all this, just remembered everything carefully. He went to the palace and played the fiddle there all night long, then he was taken back home; but all along he thought of the princess, of how to get to her. The following evening he took out the dove that had brought him there, and that he always carried about in his pocket, wound it up, got on it and flew away. He flew around the tower, inspected the windows, found that one was open, so he stopped on the window-sill to see what was going on inside.

All of a sudden the door of the next room opened and a lovely young girl, that looked like a flower just opening its petals to the morning dew, came in, walked about a bit and went back. He threw one of his gloves through the window and flew off again.

Next evening he came once more and saw that the window still stood open. He got in and had a drink of wine from a bottle that stood on the table in the room and a biscuit.

Then he thought "I'd like to go in there, but I fear she'll start crying out for help when she sees me."

Just then the door opened and the lovely girl came in. As soon as she set eyes on him she raised a terrific cry, for she'd never seen a man in her life. He spoke to her then:

"Quiet, quiet, I won't harm you, I'm a human being, just the same as you are, don't be afraid."

She was very much afraid, however, and wouldn't go up to him. So he told her all about his father, the king, told her that he was also a prince, told her where his kingdom was, then said:

"Don't you say anything to your old woman about me, she'll raise a hue and cry, they'll catch me and kill me!"

Well, she finally went up to him and sat next to him, then they walked around a bit, and she kept on wondering how it was that he was a man and she — a girl. He explained to her all about the difference between them and after that they went to bed. She seemed to enjoy his company right well and she asked him to stay with her.

He explained to her, however, that that was not possible, for if the king learnt about him being in her tower, they'd both be killed. But he told her:

"I'll fly up to you every night, only be very sure not to tell anybody about it."

A bit later he got on his dove and flew home. Next day she told the old woman to bring a bit more food and drink, for she knew he'd be coming to see her in the night.

So they went on for some time, seeing each other every night, kissing and making love, until a day came when the old woman who came to attend her noticed that she was big with child and told the king. Well, that was just terrible. He screamed at her:

"It's you, you old witch, that's let someone in; I'll have you hanged!"

He had the old woman thrown into gaol and sent for a doctor for his daughter. The doctor said "Yes, the girl is big with child!" The king immediately got together his Councillors and addressed them like this:

"Listen to me, my Councillors! How could it have happened to my daughter? Not a soul can go in through the door, and it'd have to be a bird to fly in through the window!"

The Councillors then said:

"Your highness! Tar all the window-sills, then you'll easily find out who the culprit is!"

"I'll do that," agreed the king.

And he did as he was advised; but the youth never looked at the window-sill when he came at night, and next day the king ordered to revise the feet and hands of all the men of the town, and see who had tar on them.

The young princess was brought along and told to recognize who had been with her in her tower. She looked at them, and said:

"None of those present!"

"You're lying, you worthless wench, I'll have you hanged anyhow," said the king.

"Well, if that's the case, and we're to perish anyhow, better that it be both together: that's he!"

She went up to him, took his hand and brought him forward. So judgment was passed that both be hanged. Then the youth spoke up:

"What must be — must be. Only I'd like to say good-bye to the world and to her, and she'll want to say good-bye to her father and mother."

The king gave them permission to say good-bye to each other. The youth went up to her, he put his arms around her, as if he was going to kiss her, but then he wound up his dove, and both together flew up and away! Well, they all raised such a hue and cry, it could be heard all over the kingdom:

"Catch them, hold them," they cried.

The youth cried out something rude to the king and then they flew out of sight. They flew quite a while and suddenly she said:

"I feel very poor, stop, please."

So he went down and they found themselves in a forest. She said:

"Ah, my dearest; seems I'm going to give birth to our child! "

He arranged her as well as he could on the ground, lit a fire, then got on his dove and flew to find the old woman that took care of the princess. He found her, she came out and he snatched her up onto the dove, and off they went together. The old woman nearly died of fright for she thought she'd been picked up by the devil. When they got there the princess was already having her baby.

They remained in the forest for three days, then he took the old woman home and came back for the princess and their baby. They flew off again, now to his kingdom, to his father. When they came down in the king's garden they heard a noise made by many people, and the sound of drums. He asked a man:

"What's that? "

"It's the turner. They are going to hang him, for he made a toy in the form of a dove that carried away the king's son."

"Be quick, be quick, let the king know that his son is right here, that I'm back. He mustn't hang the turner. Please, be quick! "

They were just in time to tell the king about it, he let the turner go and his son came up to him:

"I'm not alone here; I've got my betrothed in the garden."

The king sent for her, she was brought to the palace and when he heard everything from his son they were taken to the church and wedded there.

The feast was a great one for all who wished to come — from kings down to me, who has told the tale of their happiness. There was food, mead, and wine for all, but I never tasted anything, for it all went down my beard and never a drop into my mouth!

Love

Once upon a very long time ago, way before we all were born to this life, there lived in a far away country a king and his witch of a queen. They had no children and a time came when the king began to worry that there was no one to leave his kingdom to. He worried and worried, and then began to think how to get rid of his queen and get himself another wife who, maybe, would give him a son. The queen got wise to his desire of getting rid of her and decided to fool him, so as to remain queen at all costs! So she told him that she was big with child and the king was mighty glad to hear the news. He fussed about, taking care of her, and waited impatiently for the hour when she'd give birth to the child. Meanwhile the queen called all her women-in-waiting, and ordered them to get somebody's baby son. The women told her "that's easy enough, for, as everyone knows, the main thing is to bring up a baby — that's much more difficult than to have one. There never has been much problem to that! " Then, of course, any mother'd be mighty glad to make a king of her son, wouldn't she? So the women had a good look around, found plenty of women and girls big with child, and set themselves down to wait for them to give birth.

One difficulty arose, however, and that a major one, for whoever gave birth to a child it was always a girl they were delivered of, and the queen, of course, only wanted a boy.

However, one day the women happened to walk near the pond and noticed that something was floating in the water. They tried to bring it ashore with a stick, but it slipped out of their reach and floated away from the shore. They were just on the verge of giving up and going away, when they heard a child whimpering. Of course, they immediately turned back and even got into the water, but it was pretty deep, as ponds usually are, and they nearly got drowned. They considered the possibility of calling for help, but they feared that the king might get to know. While they were arguing as to what

to do a young girl came up to them — a very poor young girl, indeed. All the while she was sitting behind the bushes, waiting to see what would happen to her baby son — for she was the baby's mother. She couldn't bring him up herself, for she was afraid of what people might say, that they might laugh and jeer at her. She came up to the queen's women-in-waiting and said she'd get the baby for them, and before they could wink an eye she jumped into the water, nearly got drowned, but fetched the baby. The women got at it as fast as they could and saw that it was a tiny boy, as lovely a baby as you please! They bundled him up quickly and carried him off to the palace, straight to the queen. The girl saw them take her son to the palace, and you can well imagine how pleased she was. She waited a while, looking after them, crossed herself fervently and went back to her work joyfully, feeling as if she'd been born anew. The queen, meanwhile, announced that she'd given birth to a son. The king was so happy that he ordered a feast to be prepared for all his people.

Well, the baby grew up nicely, as a real little prince should. But he always seemed to be drawn to the common people that surrounded him. And most of all he liked to go to see a poor woman who loved him and was always much kinder to him than his mother, that witch of a queen. Of course, he never suspected that the poor woman was his real mother, but she knew well enough that he was her son and wept for joy to see him grow into such a handsome fellow. For he became the handsomest of all the boys around him.

His parents found him a lovely princess for a bride, but he wouldn't even hear of it, for he'd fallen in love with a pretty young girl, the daughter of a merchant. Of course, the merchant, although very rich, was a commoner, and how could a prince of royal blood marry a common girl?! The king and queen begged and begged the prince (they practically became hoarse begging him) to marry the princess they'd found for him. He said he'd rather kill himself than obey them. The witch-queen got terribly angry with the boy for his refusal to obey, and she decided to find out why the prince wouldn't listen to her or to the king. Nasty people are always at hand to make trouble, as we all know, so she found out that he was in love with a common girl, only nobody seemed to know who she was. The witch-queen got so mad, she used witch-craft and turned the poor boy into a human being with a pig's head. The king became still madder and sent the prince to a solitary island in the middle of the sea.

The prince managed to take away with him a small mirror that belonged to the witch-queen and a stick that belonged to the king; both the mirror and the stick were not simple things. The very first time he looked into the mirror, he saw his beloved, for he was thinking of her. When he struck the earth with the stick a young fellow appeared and asked him what it was that he wished for.

The prince asked him to fix him a house to live in, and to get him some food. Before he'd finished speaking a small house, very pretty to look at, arose before him, as well as a table with all kind of rich foods, fruits, and drinks, fit for a king's feast.

The prince walked about his island, next to the sea, and sang so beautifully that the birds grew quiet, listening to him. From time to time he looked into his mirror, to see what his love was doing, and saw her wringing her hands in despair. Then he suddenly remembered the good woman who was always so kind to him and looked into the mirror and saw her weeping bitterly.

He wanted to know why she wept so bitterly, so with the aid of the stick he called the young fellow and said:

"Bring these two women to the island."

"I can't do that," said the fellow, "only those who want to come of their own free will can come here."

The prince was overcome with sadness; he sat down near his house and looked at the beautiful flowers around it to ease his heartache a bit. In the meantime, the merchant, the young girl's father, was getting ready to go abroad to buy foreign goods. He called his three daughters and asked them what they wanted him to bring them from the far-away lands he

was going to. The eldest asked for a beautiful dress, the second daughter asked for such a psaltery that would play by itself, while the youngest, the prince's beloved, asked for one single rose from those far-away lands. And she thought to herself: if the rose doesn't fade during the journey—then the prince is alive and hasn't forgotten me. The merchant went away on his business abroad and spent some time to buy a lot of foreign goods and presents for his daughters; then he started on his homeward journey and was caught on the way by a terrific storm. He was shipwrecked and all his goods were lost. He himself managed to get hold of a board and, after being thrown about by the rough sea, he finally felt firm land under his feet, managed to get out of the water onto the shore and there he sat on a stone, lacking the strength to get up. Some time later he recovered his strength and began to feel very hungry. So he got up and started walking along the shore, hoping to find some people about, but when he came to the place he started from, he guessed that he was on an uninhabited island. It so happened that it was the same island the prince was sent to. The merchant went about, looking for berries or mushrooms to appease his hunger; he was very upset about his misfortune — not so much about the lost goods, as about the presents for his children. And, of a sudden, he saw a bush of most beautiful roses, much more beautiful than the foreign ones he was taking to his youngest daughter. He forgot his hunger and thought:

"Isn't that just fine! I'll get a rose for my favourite daughter; the elder ones will be content with anything I buy them on my way home."

Just as he was going to pick the beautiful flower a horrible-looking being, with a pig's head, came up to him. The merchant went stiff with fright.

"Don't be afraid," says the dreadful-looking thing, "only tell me who you are, where you come from and what you want my rose for?"

The merchant told him everything that had happened to him and added that he wanted the flower for his favourite daughter; he hoped it would please her, for she was very sad of late and wept a lot.

The prince, who had immediately recognized the merchant, guessed right away that the youngest daughter wept for him. He took the merchant to his house, gave him food and drink and, unrecognized by him, said:

"I'll give you the flower, you can even take as many as you like; I'll send you home, only you'll have to send me your youngest daughter. And if she won't come to me willingly, then all of us will perish!"

The merchant saw no way out and agreed to his demand. The prince then called his young servant and told him to get all the goods the merchant wanted, the most beautiful dress for the eldest daughter and the psaltery for the second daughter. Then he was to take the merchant right home. He, himself, picked a whole lot of roses from the bush, made a lovely wreath of them and said to the merchant:

"You'll give this to your youngest daughter from me."

So the merchant gathered up all his goods, and a boat came and he went home on it. Everyone was happy when he came back, but when he told everything that had happened to him, his wife and elder daughters began to weep and lament and tried to convince the youngest daughter not to go. But she was so very happy with her rose that was blooming beautifully, and looked as if it had just been picked, that she laughed happily and caressed the flower tenderly. The young girl thought that maybe it was her destiny to grieve and sorrow at first, but that afterwards she'd see the prince, look into his eyes and rejoice. She knew that it'd happen so, that the prince was alive and that she'd see him, that's why she was quite willing to go and visit that awful-looking being.

"Maybe he isn't so terrible, after all," she thought, "I'll have to see for myself. Maybe it just must be so!"

So the time came to start. Her parents and sisters begged and begged her not to go — to no avail.

"I'll go, whether you want me to or not. I don't want us all to be miserable, or even, maybe, to perish. Maybe this way it'll be better, maybe it's my destiny. And, you know, one can't get away from one's destiny."

So the parents could do nothing, they had to agree, though it was hard for them to do so, for they had to allow their favourite child to go they knew not where, at the demand of a being that did not even look human. So they prepared her for her trip, wept copiously as if they were burying her. She got on the boat that'd been waiting for her for quite some time, and off she went to meet the being that was expecting her. At that time the prince's real mother learned why he didn't come to see her any more; she found out that the wrathful king and the witch-queen (may all the evil in the world fall upon her) had hidden away her beloved boy, quite possibly had even brought about his death. Who doesn't know what a mother's heart is like?

She wept and wept, she sorrowed and grieved and finally she couldn't stand the doubts that assailed her any longer, so she went into the wide world to look for the prince. A small dog, that was always overjoyed when the prince came to visit this woman, went along with her. How true it is that dogs know who is a friend and who is an enemy. A good person — they'll never touch, a bad one — they are ready to tear to pieces. Well, this small dog would jump with glee when the prince came to see this woman; it would lick his hands, try and kiss him on the nose, it would yelp gleefully and wag its tail so that it seemed it would come off. On the other hand, neither a gypsy nor a Jew could either pass or drive along the street, or some fearless neighbour come up to the house. They would just approach the house and the dog would appear from nowhere, yelping fiercely, barking his head off, going quite hoarse with anger, until his mistress would come out and tell him to keep still.

So off they go on their search, the dog running before her to show the way. When the woman got tired and lay down to rest, the dog would sit next to her, guarding her sleep. It would sniff this way and that, would prick his ears, attentive to the least noise, in case some evil person would approach. Thus she walked and walked with her dog, asking the good people she met whether they'd seen her beloved son, or heard of him. Her feet ached so, she could barely walk, and still all said they'd neither seen nor heard of him.

She went through the whole kingdom — and found nothing. Then an old granny told her to try some foreign lands, that maybe people could tell her something there. The woman thanked the kind old granny for her advice and decided to try some foreign lands. But then she learned that these lands were far, far away, that between her land and those foreign lands there were many wide, deep seas, that one couldn't walk there, but had to travel by boat. So she went up to the sea and wanted to get on a boat, but they wouldn't let her:

"Where do you think you're going, woman?" they said, "only princes, counts, and Jews travel in this here boat."

Well, the poor woman began to weep bitterly, and went to another boat and begged and begged to be allowed on board; she bowed low to the sailors, tried to kiss their hands, and there were some kind people who asked them to let her come. But the sailors wouldn't let the dog come on board.

"What do you want with this mangy beast," they said, "it'll only bring filth on board."

The woman couldn't leave her dog behind, for it was a faithful little beast; so she began to weep again and walked on. It seemed that the dog knew what it was all about, for it jumped joyfully into her arms and licked her, lovingly. So she walked and walked with her dog, until she came up to the boat on which the merchant's young daughter was going to travel. As she approached the boat she again asked the sailors to take her.

"Come on, woman, come on," they said. "We've been told to take anyone on board who wants to come with us of his own will."

So she went on board the boat; the little dog got onto it too — nobody noticed it.

The boat was beautiful, it looked more like a palace than a boat. The woman got into a far-away corner and sat there as quiet as a mouse; the small dog lay down at her feet, with his ears pricked, always on guard. Quite soon the merchant's daughter came on board, but she didn't see the woman. An hour or so passed and the vessel stopped near the shore. A man came up to her and said:

"All right, woman, it's time to get off; we're there! "

So she picked up her small bundle, got off the boat onto the shore, and went walking after her little dog that showed her the way. The merchant's daughter also got off the boat and went straight to the prince's house. When the prince saw her he couldn't pronounce a single word — from sheer joy. The merchant's young daughter had everything there that her heart might desire — the best of food, drink, dresses, jewels, — anything and as much of everything as she wanted. She did nothing all day long, but walk around among the flowers and make wreaths. She made herself a wreath of roses, placed it on her hair, took a look at herself in the mirror and burst into bitter tears.

"What do I need my beauty for, if I have nobody to show it to, for there is no one here besides that awful being with the pig's head."

The prince did all he could think of, he gave her all kind of presents, but nothing made her look at him. That was quite logical — a being with a pig's head did not look human. It was enough to look at him to feel sick, let alone have anything to do with him. The prince became sadder and sadder, as the days passed; he wouldn't eat or drink, he even stopped looking after his flowers. All day long he walked about the wood that was near the shore; he either wept, or sang songs, beautiful, sad songs that made one's heart ache to hear, and tears spring to one's eyes. One day when the merchant's daughter went to the sea-shore she heard someone sing and the song seemed to bewitch her: she listened and tears coursed down her cheeks, she could not move and stood there till the sun dropped behind the sea and it suddenly became dark. The last notes of the song had sounded long ago, and still she stood there, as in a dream.

Meanwhile the prince came back to his house; he looked around and didn't see his beloved anywhere. So he ran back to the wood to look for her, found her finally on the sea-shore, and took her home. By that time it was quite dark and the poor girl kept stumbling and falling all the time. The prince, fearing that she'd be all black and blue if she kept on falling, picked her up in his arms and carried her as easily as if she were a feather. He talked so tenderly to her, that the girl clean forgot his pig's head. And she thought that it was her lover, the beautiful young prince, of whom she thought long nights through, that it was he, her dearly beloved, who had miraculously found her and was now carrying her in his strong arms, who was whispering tender words to her, and was pressing her close to his manly breast. And she was so happy, her heart beat so joyfully, that it seemed to her that she'd willingly spend all her life in the arms of her lover, listening to his tender words, to his dear voice. He brought her into the house and asked her to have supper with him. However, she thanked him and lay down on her bed without lighting the candles, for she didn't want to frighten away the lovely dream; she'd lie in the dark, think of her lover and try and remember the voice of her beloved prince. She never slept a wink all night, burning with fever as if she'd been thrown into a fire. Then she recollected that there was no prince any more, sharp needles seemed to tear at her heart-strings, and tears began to trickle down her cheeks. Next day she wouldn't eat, nor drink, and spent the whole day crying into her pillow. As soon as evening came, she went to the sea-shore again. Again she heard someone singing, so beautifully, so joyfully this time, that her headache seemed to disappear. Again she stood there, listening till darkness fell, and once again the prince came and carried her home in his arms. Again her heart trembled with joy, her head felt sweetly dizzy, and again she spent the whole night long thinking of her love. On the third day she met the being with the pig's head in the garden. He was cutting roses for her. She barely gave him a glance and burst into loud sobs. He tried to speak to her, to quiet her, but she only sobbed louder, wringing her hands in despair. Then she told him to go away, that she never wanted

to see him again, and ran to the sea-shore to hear the voice of the beautiful singer. However, nobody sang there that evening. Only the trees seemed to whisper in the wood, and the sea murmured, running its waves over the pebbles on the shore. She sat there for a long while, mourning over her lost youth, over her lost hopes to meet her beloved; finally, she could stand her misery no longer, so she went and threw herself into the sea. At the same moment the little dog that belonged to the woman who came on the same boat to the island appeared suddenly from nowhere, jumped after the girl, grabbed her and began to pull her to the shore. His mistress saw this and helped him get the girl out of the sea. She began shaking her to make her recover and finally the girl opened her eyes. When she saw an unknown woman next to her, she felt a bit better. They talked a while, then went home together. On the way each of them told the other what made them come to the island. Well, they came home, and there they were faced with still more trouble. You see, the young prince felt so miserable when the merchant's daughter sent him away, so miserable as he'd never felt before. He thought the girl would be able to love him for his kind heart, his tenderness, his sweet words, but it seemed there was no hope for that. So he got out his wonderful mirror, to see what his sweet love was doing, and at that moment he saw her jump into the sea and get drowned. He couldn't stand this, his heart seemed to burst with pain, he fell on the ground in a swoon that looked like death itself. The servants came running up, but they didn't know what to do. At this very moment the merchant's daughter and the woman she was with came up to the house. As usual, the small dog came first, it ran up to the prince, sniffed him all over and began to yelp, to wag its tail, to lick the prince's hands and his pig's head. The woman guessed immediately that this was her son, who had probably been bewitched by somebody.

"Oh, dear! " she cried, "this man is bewitched."

Pity for the poor man overflowed the girl's heart. She knelt by him and began to caress him, and whisper tender soothing words to him. The prince came out of his swoon and saw the young girl kneeling next to him, and the good woman, whom he loved so well, also standing near him; this made him feel very happy, indeed. He stood up, thanked them for their kindness towards him and began to treat them to all kind of tasty food and things; the small dog never left his side for a moment. It kept on licking his hands and fawning over him. So they sat together till evening came. The woman began to fix herself up a place to spend the night, while the girl with the unfortunate being with the pig's head went for a walk. The evening was beautiful: warm and calm everywhere. The sun had gone down some time ago and only the cloudlets were still tinged with red. And then, all of a sudden, the being with the pig's head began to sing; he sang so beautifully that his voice seemed to flood the soul, and it made tears and laughter mingle. And the girl suddenly thought that she'd spend her life listening to these songs, and that she'd not want anything else in the world! Darkness fell; bright stars appeared, twinkling, and it seemed that they murmured: the world is lovely, it is good to be alive and in love. Love, and you'll achieve anything you set your heart upon. Meanwhile, the singer continued his song, and so much love sounded in it that the girl's head swam and her heart overflowed with happiness. Without realizing what she was doing, she took the awful-looking head between her hands and kissed it. At that same instant he turned into the handsome prince he used to be, took the girl into his arms and carried her home, where his mother (his real mother, not the witch-queen), was already waiting for him. There was no end to their rejoicing; and so they lived happily ever after, never forgetting the poor people that surrounded them.







*She came up
to the queen's women-in-waiting
and said
she'd get the baby
for them,
and before they could wink an eye-lid
she jumped
into the water,
nearly got drowned,
but fetched the baby.*

*The women
got at it
as fast
as they could
and saw
that it was a tiny boy,
as lovely a baby
as you please!
They bundled him up quickly
and carried him off
to the palace,
straight to the queen.*

*The girl
saw them take her son
to the palace,
and you can well imagine
how pleased she was.
She waited a while,
looking after them,
crossed herself fervently
and went back
to her work joyfully,
feeling
as if she'd been born anew.
The queen, meanwhile,
announced that she'd given birth to a son.
The king was so happy
that he ordered a feast
to be prepared
for all his people.*

*Well,
the baby grew up nicely,
as a real little prince should.
But he always seemed
to be drawn to the common people
that surrounded him.
And most of all
he liked to go to see a poor woman*

Darakhvei, the Great Oak

Once upon a time there lived an old man with his old woman. They had three daughters. When the daughters grew up the old woman died; the old man married again, a young duchess she was. As you know, a step-mother is not what a real mother is; that, most unfortunately, was the case with the young wife, who did not love her step-daughters at all, and said to her old husband:

"Get your daughters out of the way — I don't care where you take them to, whether it's to the woods, to the sea, or to the great, lonely fields as long as you get them away; if you don't — I'll make it my business to send them to the world to come! "

The old man didn't know what to do: he was sorry for his daughters, and sorrier, still, for his young wife. So he obeyed her, his love for her overcoming his common sense; and he said to his daughters:

"Dear daughters, take your baskets and I'll take my axe, and let's go together to the marsh."

When they came there, he said:

"Well, my beloved daughters, pick berries on this glade, here, while I'll go to that other glade over there to chop splinters to give us light in the evening."

He left them there and walked away so that they would not see him; when he reached the glade he took a small pine board and tied it to a birch tree; then he got on his horse and rode off home as fast as he could, so as to quiet the ache in his heart for his darlings. The pine board went toc-toc against the birch tree, and the daughters said:

"There's our dear Father, chopping splinters! " At the same time they kept on picking berries. And then darkness began to fall. The eldest of the girls said:

"Let's go to Father; he must have forgotten all about us! "

So they went to the glade where the pine-board was toc-tocking away, and saw there was nobody there. They began to weep bitterly, for they understood what had happened. The eldest sister said:

"Well, here's our death hour; it's come for us! Our evil stepmother hates us and she forced our Father to get rid of us. And he didn't know how to fight her hate towards us, so he brought us to this here forest! "

The second sister said:

"Let's go and sit under a green pinetree, and eat the bread that we brought in our bag. Then we'll go on — and maybe we'll get somewhere."

They found a pinetree, sat down under it. Bitter pain arose in their hearts against their Father, who obeyed the nasty step-mother and took them, his own daughters, to a sure death in the dense, dark forest; they wept copious, scalding tears! They wept so long and so copiously that their crystal-clear tears finally formed rivers that ran to the four parts of the world.

One of those rivers reached the palace of the tzar of a certain kingdom. The tzar gets up nice and early in the morning and washes himself nice and clean; he says his prayers and then goes out onto the balcony. And what do you think he sees? Yes, you're right! He sees a river that did not exist yesterday. The tzar looks and can't believe his eyes — the river is so very beautiful. He wants to know where it comes from. He calls his faithful servants and gives them an order:

"My very faithful servants," he says, "go along the bank of this river until you come to its very beginning, and whatsoever you find there, whether it be a bird, a beast or a human being, bring it here to me! "

So those servants set out on their way and walked for quite a while, until they came to the green pinetree. Underneath the tree sat three lovely girls, the three sisters.

"Well," said the servants, "we'll take you to the tzar's palace. That's what he ordered us to do! "

The girls resigned themselves to this order. When they came to the tzar they bowed low to him and he asked them:

"Who are you, and where do you come from? "

They answered:

"We are common people, your highest highness! Our evil step-mother hates us and she made our Father take us and leave us in a dense, dark forest. We got very frightened, began to weep, to grieve, and the tears we shed started rivers that flowed to the four parts of the world."

The tzar looked at them — they were really very beautiful, those three girls. The tzar says to them:

"You are maidens and I'm a bachelor. Whichever of you is more skilful and clever — I'll make her my wife! "

The eldest answers him:

"If your highest highness gives me just one grain of wheat, I'll raise enough food to feed all your kingdom! "

The second sister says:

"I'll make enough clothes to dress all your kingdom with one silken thread! "

The tzar then turns to the youngest:

"And what are *you* clever and skilful at, child? "

The youngest sister says:

"Your very highest highness — I'm neither very clever, nor am I quite dumb; if you choose me to be your wife, I'll bear you twelve sons — all alike as to voice, and to gait, to speech and to face; they'll be in gold up to their knees, in silver up to their waists; the new moon will glitter on their brows, stars will twinkle in their hair, and the sun will light up their temples! "

The tzar turned these answers well over in his head and consulted his counsellors. And he decided to marry the youngest girl and give the other two land and all kind of riches.

They lived together, the tzar and his young wife, for about three years and then she became pregnant. At the same time the tzar had to go off to war to faraway, foreign lands. So he left and the tzarina gave birth to twelve sons, just as she had promised — all alike as to voice and to gait, to speech and to face; up to their knees in gold, in silver up to their waists, the new moon glittering on their brows, stars twinkling in their hair, the sun lighting up their temples. The two older sisters decided to get rid of the boys together with their mother and bribed the midwife to help them in their dirty work. However, the tzar's servants didn't let the midwife into the palace, for they took great care of the young tzarina and her sons. They sent a messenger to the tzar with a letter, telling him of the great good news. The messenger walked and walked all day long, and finally darkness fell. He began to look for some place to spend the night at, and it so happened that he came to the house of the elder sister, who recognized him at once. She said:

"Be my guest and spend the night at my house; I'll heat up the bath-house, so you can have a good wash after your long journey."

The old man agreed of course, put the letter behind the icon-case, and went off to the bath-house. As soon as he closed the door of the bath-house she snatched the letter, read it, and wrote to the second sister: "Dearest sister! You know that our youngest sister has given birth to twelve sons, just as she promised she would! Let's write to the tzar that she gave birth to something awful — that it's neither bug nor frog, that it neither crawls nor hops, that it neither sings nor croaks. Then he'll order his servants to kill her and her sons and he'll marry one of us!" When the messenger came from the bath-house, he ate some supper and then lay down to sleep. In the morning he got up early, washed his face, said his prayers, and started off again on his way to the tzar. He walked till night fell and spent the night at the home of the second sister. This one also heated up the bath-house for him and as soon as he went there she read her sister's letter, burnt the one that was written by the tzar's servants, and wrote instead what her sister instructed her to write. And even

added, of her own accord: "Your wife's given birth to something that's nasty, that it's even impossible to describe it, neither can one show it to anybody!" She then licked up the letter and put it where the messenger had left his. When the old man came from the bath-house he ate some supper and lay down to sleep. Next morning he got up early, washed his face, said his prayers and went off once more on his journey. Finally he got to the tsar's war camp and gave him the letter. The tsar read it and you can well imagine how horrified he was: "Dear God! Just think! What she promised me — and then, what she bore me!" He thought and thought, and then wrote back to his servants: "Whatever it was that was born, whether bug or frog or any other unmentionable thing, — let it be until I come back!" The messenger went back home with this order and stopped at the second sister's house. She heated the bath-house for him again, and again read the letter he'd put behind the icon-case when he went to have a wash. She then burnt the letter and in its stead wrote another, ordering the boys to be killed. The messenger came from the bath-house, ate some supper, had a good night's rest and next morning set out on his way, stopping at the house of the eldest sister. She likewise sent him to the bath-house, read her sister's letter and added to it: "eleven of the sons, to be sewn up in a hide bag, while the tsarina with the youngest to be put into a tarred barrel and the whole lot thrown into the sea."

Well, the messenger finally got home with this letter. The city was all aglow with the beauty of the twelve boys. All the dukes and all the princes could not admire them enough! They couldn't understand why the tsar should want them to be destroyed, but then, an order was an order and what could they do about it? Why, nothing, of course, but obey it. So they got the eleven boys and sewed them up into a hide bag, put the mother and the youngest into a tarred barrel and threw the whole lot of them into the deep blue sea.

God's angels seemed to care for them, however, for a wind arose and the hide bag with the eleven brothers didn't sink but floated right into an unknown kingdom. On the very shore of the blue sea stood a mighty tree — Darakhvei, the Great Oak, with twelve huge boughs and a hollow in the trunk.

The eldest brother noticed that their hide was no longer afloat and said:

"Dear brothers — seems to me we can rest a bit now: let's break open this hide bag and get out of it."

"We won't be able to break it open, brother dear!" say the others.

"Don't say that," says the eldest brother, "didn't our mother bear us and didn't she bless us for a happy life? So let's bless each other and see what we can do!"

So they blessed each other thrice and the third time their efforts were successful, for the hide bag burst into small pieces! They came out onto the shore, saw the great oak standing there, and got inside its hollow.

Meanwhile the tsarina and her youngest floated in the barrel three days and three nights. On the fourth, the son says:

"Well, Mother dearest, I feel we've reached land; now we'll have to get out of the barrel!"

"Oh! my dearest child," says the tsarina, "we'll never break this barrel open!"

"Ah! Mother of mine! Thou brought me into the world and blessed me for a happy life — so give me thy blessing again, now!"

So she blessed him once, then once more, and only after the third blessing he hit the bottom of the barrel clean out with his fist and they both came out onto the island Booday, where he built a city he called Keetay. After living there for a while he said to his mother:

"I'd like to find my brothers somewhere, Mother dear!"

"Thou wilt not be able to find them, my son, they've perished in the deep blue sea!" But he insisted:

"I know Mother, that I can find them. Far, far away, there is an unknown kingdom and in it, on the very shore of the blue sea stands Darakhvei, the Great Oak, with twelve

huge boughs and a hollow in the trunk. My brothers are in that hollow and can't leave it, for next to the great oak there sits a bird that devours people. It is anxious to devour them, but, fortunately, it can't get into the hollow, and they won't leave their refuge! Mother dear! Knead me some dough with thy milk, bake me twelve breads with it and give me thy blessing for my long journey, for I'll go to look for my brothers! "

The mother did as he asked her and he went off to the far-away kingdom; there he immediately found Darakhvei, the Great Oak, that stands with its twelve huge boughs. Truly, the Oak was great, but the bird that devoured people was still bigger.

"Ah, ha! " says the bird. "Welcome to my kingdom! I've seen grander fellows come here and have devoured them all! It won't be any trouble to devour you, I warrant? "

"Well, well, you great big bird! " says the prince, "I've heard a lot about you, so don't be so quick to brag about yourself. Let's try our strength first! "

And he caught hold of the enormous bird and banged it against the strong old oak and the twelve boughs came right off the tree! He banged the bird a second time against the earth — and that was the end of it! So he says loudly:

"Whoever there is in the hollow of the oak, come out! If you are an old man — you'll be a father to me, if you're my age — then we'll be brothers! "

Eleven handsome youths come out of the hollow and ask him for some food. He takes out the twelve breads, gives one to each of the youths and leaves one for himself. As soon as they bite into the breads they understand that the dough is made with their Mother's milk, and they immediately guess that their saviour is their youngest brother. And they all go off together to the big city of Keetay.

At that time some travelling merchants were going by ship to their Father's kingdom.

The youngest brother turned into a fly and went on their ship to the tzar, his Father. The tzar began to ask the merchants where they'd been and what they'd seen. They told him:

"We were in a far-away kingdom. In that kingdom there is an island, and its name is Booday; on the island stands a city; its name is Keetay. The city is all aglow, for twelve handsome youths live there — all alike as to voice and to gait, to speech and to face; they're in gold up to their knees, in silver up to their waists; a new moon glitters on their brows, stars twinkle in their hair and the sun lights up their temples! "

The tzar immediately guessed: "Surely those are my children! "

The elder sister said, angrily: "Well, highness, and what is there to that? They aren't your children! Your children will be those who'll be able to get from a kingdom still further away a cat by the name of Valdai. There is a tree there, which is called Darakhvei, the Great Oak, that stands there with twelve great boughs: the cat lives on that oak. When he walks down its trunk he sings ballads, when he goes up again, he tells tales! "

The young prince hears it all and goes home to his city, with the merchants, on their way back. He tells his brothers and his mother all he'd heard and says:

"Well, hasn't our aunty given us a riddle to solve?! Mother, dearest, give us thy blessing and we'll see what we can do."

So she gives them her blessing and the twelve youths go out into the green fields, into the dense forest and there they shout in their mighty, ringing voices, and lo and behold! everything they called for is right there, in their city, in the morning! The merchants pass the city again on their way to the tzar's kingdom, and again the youngest prince turns into a fly and journeys with them. The tzar repeats his questions, as to where they'd been and what they'd seen, and they tell him about the Great Oak Darakhvei and its ballad-singing and tale-telling cat Valdai; the oak now stands on the shore of the Booday island; seems that someone brought it there.

Well, the elder sister doesn't keep quiet this time either:

"That's nothing to wonder at, highness. The real wonder is in a very, very far-off kingdom: there's a silver and a gold apple-tree there; silver and gold apples; silver and gold branches. That is a real wonder, and those who can get it will certainly be your children! "

The young prince hears all this, of course, and returns home with the merchants and tells everything to his mother and brothers.

"You won't be able to do anything about it, children dear! And you won't bring back your father!" says the mother.

However, they ask her to bless them, and once again they all go together into the green fields and the dense forests, and there they all shout in their mighty, ringing voices, and lo, and behold! during the night a silver and a gold apple tree grows up on the shore, with silver and gold branches, and silver and gold apples.

And once again the merchants pass the city of Keetay on their way to the tzar's kingdom. And once again the prince goes with them, transformed into a fly. The tzar once again asks them what wonders they've seen, and they tell him about the silver and gold apple trees on the island Booday in the city of Keetay. The tzar says:

"Well, probably my children got them!"

The eldest sister must have her say again:

"Goodness, highness, how can your children be alive if they were all drowned! Your children will be those who'll get, in a far, far-away kingdom, a bridge that alternates one silver plank and one gold one, and as you travel over it there'll always be a plank in front of you, but the one you've just crossed — disappears!"

The prince comes back with the merchants ship and tells his brothers and his mother about the wonder-bridge. The tzarina says they'll never be able to solve this riddle, nor will they ever see their father. Her youngest answers:

"Give us thy blessing, as thou didst before!"

So she gives them her blessing, and they all go out into the green fields and the dense forests and there they shout in their mighty, ringing voices — and lo, and behold! during the night the bridge appears on their island.

When the merchants tell the tzar about this wonder, he says:

"That there are my children, for sure! I'm going to see them at once!"

The elder sister has nothing to say this time, so he goes and she goes after him. When they approach the bridge he crosses first, but after him the planks of the bridge disappear, she can't cross. So the tzar comes to the island of Booday, to the city of Keetay. He finds it all aglow for his sons are there. He sees the tzarina and recognizes her immediately. She brings the twelve sons to him, the sons she promised him — all alike, as to voice and to gait, to speech and to face; in gold up to their knees, in silver up to their waists, a new moon glittering on their brows, stars twinkling in their hair, the sun lighting up their temples.

Their rejoicing was very great and they gave a feast for the whole world that wanted to come to it. The elder sisters were punished, of course; the tzar had them tied to the horses' tails and then the horses were let out into the fields.

The Drunkard in Hell

One fine day a drunkard found himself in Hell. The devils made him responsible for a cauldron, in which three hundred souls were put to boil.

But the living relatives of those three hundred souls were zealously praying for them.

An angel approached the drunkard responsible for those souls:

"Let me have those three hundred souls," he said.

The angel guessed right away what the drunkard wanted, and in a short while came back with a pint of vodka.

The drunkard grabbed at the bottle and began to gulp avidly; soon he was quite drunk and gave the three hundred sinful souls to the angel.

The devils came to see how the boiling was getting along; however, there were no souls anywhere.

"Where are the souls?" they asked the drunkard, "where are the souls we ordered you to boil?"

The drunkard never said a word (he simply couldn't speak), he only lifted a finger to his lips, to show where his soul was.

The devils got scared:

"Of all the greedy devils! In less than two hours he managed to gobble up three hundred souls! He'll empty the whole of Hell at that rate and we won't have a single sinner left. Throw him out!"

So all of them got together and threw the drunkard out of Hell. He had nowhere to go, so he went to Heaven.

A Crippled Hero

Once upon a time, in a far-away kingdom, there lived a blacksmith with his wife. To her great sorrow the wife gave birth to a lovely boy who was, unfortunately, a cripple. The boy grew but it gave them little happiness, for what happiness can a born cripple bring his parents? He was treated more as a foundling than as a son. The blacksmith's wife would get through her work at the stove and would run to the field, or to the vegetable patch, while the little fellow would just lie about on the ground, suck a crust of bread or munch a stewed potato. The unfortunate woman once left him lying in the yard and the pigs nearly ate him — she didn't even pretend to care for her child.

"Why, what can we expect from him?" she said. "A cripple's no help in the house, only a burden. It'd be better for all of us if God rested his soul."

However, the boy seemed to thrive on the little food they gave him and the absolute lack of care: he grew well, only he couldn't walk, but just crawled about. As the woman said — whether they fed him or not, they'd get nothing out of him. At last she began cursing him and calling to God to explain to her why He'd given her a son — not for joy, as to other people, but for continuous sorrow. The blacksmith listened to the curses of the foolish woman, but what could he do if she refused to heed him. The blacksmith was sorry for the boy but his wife was poisoning his life with her curses. At last he could stand it no longer, so he harnessed the mare, put his son on the cart and drove off with him to the forest. He drove way into the depth of the forest and wanted to leave him there, but all of a sudden he saw a small hut. He went in, but there was no one there. He looked about him, saw that there was food and drink in the hut, but no master. So he carried his son in and left him there; then he got onto the cart, lashed at the mare and started off without ever turning back, fearing that someone might catch up with him. The boy was left all by himself in the hut, looking around, getting acquainted with his new surroundings. A while later an old man came in and asked for some water.

"I'd be glad to give you some, but I can't walk," says the boy.

"Here," says the old man, "try some first; it's good water."

The boy was very thirsty and he drank all the water in the ladle.

As soon as he had drunk it, he felt an extraordinary wave of strength flowing into him. It seemed he could turn the whole world upside down, if he could only manage to stand up. The old man also drank his fill and said:

"Drink as much as you can of this water, for you'll need a lot of strength," he said, and seemed to disappear into thin air, as if he'd never existed.

The boy wondered whether he hadn't been dreaming, but all of a sudden he saw that he had strong, healthy legs, that he could walk on them and he felt that he was walking

on air. He drank some more water and it seemed to him that there was no one in the whole world as powerful as he was. He wanted to have another drink, took hold of the pail, but it slipped out of his hands and the water spilt all over the hut. He snatched up the pail and ran to the stream, but couldn't find it anywhere, it seemed to have gone underground. He went back to the hut, but that had also disappeared. He started walking here, there, and everywhere and finally got so mixed up that he simply didn't know where to go. So he stood quietly for a while and then went along through the forest. On his way he saw a huge pinetree, a little further an oak the size of a stove. He grabbed them with one hand and they cracked like dried straws. So he went along, throwing trees down on his way, and it seemed that a whirlwind has gone through the forest. He did that to mark his way, so as not to come back to the same path. He walked thus for quite a long while until he came out onto a road, on the sides of which lay huge stones that looked more like rocks than stones. He began to throw them onto the road, picking them up as if they were potatoes. Suddenly he saw some fine, hefty, young men riding along the road; they came up to him and stood confused, for the road was blocked — the great stones were now right in the middle of it.

"Good day, youngster," they said, "what are you doing?"

"Oh! just playing around," answered the boy.

The men got off their horses and tried to clear the way; they got hold of one stone and couldn't so much as move it. The boy came up to them, took up the stone and threw it into the ditch on the side of the road.

"Come with us," said the young men.

"How can I go with you, when I have no horse?"

"Choose one of ours."

The boy went to choose himself a horse but couldn't find any to suit him.

He barely put his hand on the beast's back — it fell to its knees immediately. He tried all of the horses and not one was strong enough for him. However, he went along with them, walking beside their horses. All of a sudden he saw a muzhik, ploughing the field not far from the road. His mare was small and thin, but with good sinews. The boy went up to the muzhik and put his hand on the mare, it stood up to it without apparent effort. So he began bargaining with the muzhik for the mare, but the owner of the beast just wouldn't consider parting with it for any money.

"I don't need money," he said, "anybody might even steal it; but how am I to get my work done without a horse? You know, a man without a horse is worthless."

"Swap the mare for one of our horses," said the boy's new friends, "you can take the one you fancy."

"It's no good changing one's working tools, you know!" said the muzhik.

Finally they convinced him, however, and he left his mare to the boy and took a pair of the best horses for it. The boy got on his mare and off they went, all together. On their way they came to the village where the boy's father lived, and went to him to have their horses re-shod. The blacksmith didn't recognize his son — he had changed so — and he also shod the boy's mare. After he'd finished shoeing the horses, the boy asked the blacksmith to forge him a club. The blacksmith collected all the iron he had and forged a club that three people couldn't lift. The boy picked it up with one hand and sent it flying into the sky. His friends looked on in amazement.

When the club came down a bit later with a thundering noise, the boy put his knee out to stop its fall, and the club hit his knee and bent crooked. The blacksmith added another pound or so of iron, forged the club anew, and they all went off together, into the wide world. They came to some kingdom or other and went to work for the czar that ruled it. At that same time an enormous serpent appeared in the kingdom; it came flying into the town, grabbed people and took them to its cave. It got away with quite a lot of people and ate them all up; finally it decided it wanted to try royal flesh for a change and carried off the czar's daughter. However, it didn't eat her up at once, but left her for

dessert. The tzar called to all his subjects to free his daughter and kill the serpent. He said he'd give half of his kingdom and his daughter in marriage. Many a valiant warrior tried his luck and fell victim to the fiend. At last the strong young fellows who came with the blacksmith's son said they'd also go.

"Come with us," they said to the boy, "you're very young, it's surely time for you to look for glory. We'll be your teachers and show you how to fight."

The boy agreed and off they went. After riding some time they came to a mile-stone with a sign on which something was written. One of the lot could read a bit, and this is what he read to them: "He who takes the road to the right will procure glory for himself, he who takes the road to the left will procure riches, he who advances straight ahead — will face death." They all chose the road to the right and went off in search of glory, excepting the boy, who said that one couldn't get away from death in the long run anyhow, so it was better to just go ahead. His friends tried to convince him to go with them, but he was very stubborn and went straight forward, as he'd said. After riding a while he came upon the very hut in which his father had left him some time ago, when he was a cripple. He tied his mare to a tree and went into the hut. Glancing into the corner he saw a very old woman sitting there.

"Good day, granny! "

"Good day to you, young one. Where are you heading for? "

"I'm just riding straight ahead of me, granny."

"Don't do that, young one, for you'll die. The serpent lives there and'll eat you."

"Nothing doing, granny. I'm going even if I have to perish! "

"I'm sorry for you, young one. You've been in my hut, and you're sort of a grandson to me. So listen carefully and pay heed to what I tell you. Whatever you meet on your way — don't kill a single living thing, for it may be useful to you if you're in trouble."

The boy thanked the old woman and rode off. He'd barely gone a little way from the hut, when a hare jumped out of the bushes. He grabbed his club, but the hare begged:

"Don't kill me, I'll be of use to you if you're in trouble."

So he went on, the hare running after him. A little further a grey wolf came out from behind the trees. He seized his club again, but the wolf said:

"Don't kill me, you'll need me in trouble."

He lowered the club and rode on, the wolf following in his mare's footmarks. Finally he came to a stone mountain and saw that there was no way to go any further. He got off his mare, let her go to have a feed, and then went to look for some path or road to continue his journey. At that the serpent crawled out of its cave to hunt for food and crawled to where the mare was eating grass. The wolf saw that the serpent would eat the mare so it rushed at it and frightened it so badly, that it galloped off quick as lightning and got away from the serpent.

The fiend found something else to feed on, and returned to its cave. The hare came running up to the boy and showed him the crack in the rock, where the serpent had hidden the tzar's daughter. The boy banged his club against the stone wall and the girl appeared, saying:

"Flee from here, for the serpent'll eat you."

The boy swung his club and smashed it against the stone wall. The girl rushed out and threw arms round his neck, begging him to take her home to her parents. But at that moment the serpent appeared in the crack and was just on the point of gobbling the boy up, when the latter smashed his club on its head. He cut out the serpent's tongue and put it in his bag. But the heads continued to appear, one after the other; the boy smashed the remaining eleven ones and that was the end of the serpent. He cut out the whole lot of eleven tongues, and put them away in his bag. The tzar's daughter was overjoyed that such a great hero had saved her from the wicked serpent, and of course she immediately fell in love with him and promised to marry him as soon as she got back home to her father and mother. Then she took out a small handkerchief, tore it into two halves, and gave the boy

one of them. He put the handkerchief near his heart and lay down and went to sleep, for he was very tired after his battle with the serpent. His sleep was so deep, that he didn't hear his former companions ride up; they saw the czar's daughter there, and began questioning her as to what had happened. She told them everything, and added that she was going to marry her young hero. The fellows felt envious of the boy, ran up to him and killed him in his sleep. Then they began to quarrel fiercely about who'd marry the czar's daughter. They quarrelled and quarrelled, and finally began to fight and fought until they killed each other, all except the strongest of them all. He made the young girl swear that she'd tell her father and mother that *he* was the one that killed the serpent and freed her from her prison of stone. What could the poor child do, but agree to say everything the man told her to, for the boy she loved was dead. So the man lifted her up on his horse and took her home. Meanwhile the hare ran to the stream, filled his mouth with live water, came back to where the boy lay and spat the water into his eyes. The boy recovered his senses and awoke. He looked around, but there was no girl to be seen anywhere. He guessed that something very terrible had happened and nearly wept with grief and misery.

He wanted to run as fast as he could to the czar, to tell him what had really happened but of course it would have taken him a lot of time to get there on foot. While he was wondering what to do, the wolf ran into the forest and found the boy's mare. He frightened it a bit and it headed for the place where the boy was thinking what to do next. Once on horseback everything seemed easier and he set out to reach the palace. When he got there he saw that everything was ready for the wedding and the merry-making. He ran to the czar and told him the whole truth, however the czar didn't believe him and went to ask his daughter. The young girl, naturally, only said what the man that brought her told her to say, for she saw the boy she loved being murdered. So the czar ordered the boy to be hanged for lying.

Only then did they ask him who he was.

"I'm the crippled hero," he said, "and I won't tell you anything more."

So they took the crippled hero to be hanged. Meanwhile the czar's daughter went into the garden to walk around a bit. The boy, who was being led to be hanged, suddenly saw his hare near the path. So he got the half of the handkerchief the young girl had given him and threw it to the hare. The little beast picked it up and ran with it to the czar's daughter. She just looked at it and nearly fainted away.

"What's ailing you?" asked the czar.

She fell on her knees before him and told him all the truth, begging him not to kill the boy who'd freed her from the serpent. So the czar gave the order not to hang the boy, but to bring him to their presence, to the palace. The boy came, carrying his bag with him and told the czar the truth about all that had happened. The man who was going to marry the czar's daughter said that he was lying. When the boy heard this he took the twelve tongues of the serpent out of his bag, and said:

"And what, may I ask you, are these?"

The man could find no answer to his questions and meanwhile the girl showed her father the two halves of the handkerchief. Then, of course, everybody believed the boy. The great big fellow who tried to deceive everybody was hanged, while the crippled hero married the lovely daughter of the czar and got half of the kingdom for a wedding gift. The wedding was wonderful. .

I was at their wedding, drank quite a lot but didn't get drunk, for I spilt most of the wine down my beard!

Two Brothers

A long time ago two brothers lived together in a village, until the day came when they decided to separate. They divided all they had between them and the elder deceived his younger brother: he kept seven of their eight cows and took everything else they had. The younger brother only got one cow. So he became a very poor peasant and could do nothing about it — he had to go and toil for the rich brother and would barely get a crust of bread that the rich one would give him to eat. At home there was nothing to eat, but he had a wife and a young daughter to feed. People said to him:

"Look here," they said, "whatever are you about? You toil and toil, your brother gives you a crust to munch, but you have naught to take home! Go, work for other people. You'll at least be given some bread to eat yourself, and a mite to take home for your wife and daughter!"

So the poor brother went to work for other people, not for his rich brother. He worked there for a day, maybe even for two days; they gave him some bread, maybe even a handful of flour, or a bit of anything they had. He took the bread he earned with his work home, and didn't they all have a feast then! Well, just then the rich brother comes along and says:

"Why, brother," he says, "why don't you come to see me anymore?"

"Well," the poor brother answers, "what for must I go to see you? I toil and toil for you, and maybe you give me a crust to eat, but never a piece of bread to take home! So, I won't go to your house any more, brother, but I'll treat you to some food in mine. Here, wife, bring some milk from our cow and the bit of bread I earned. Sit down, brother," he says, "eat with me!"

So the rich brother sat down and ate his fill. Then he thanked his poor brother and went home.

When he came home he said to his wife:

"See, wife," he said, "we divided everything we had with my brother, but it did not come out right, somehow?"

"Why?"

"Well, he has one cow that gives him milk and we have seven, but they are not worth his one cow! Now, what dost thou say to that, wife?" says he.

"What dost thou want me to say?"

"Why, say that we must get his cow from him, that's all!"

"But how can we get his cow?" says the wife.

"How? oh, that's easy. I'll go to the master. You see, I am rich and my brother is poor, so I'll go to the master and tell him that my brother took bread from me and never gave it back, nor anything else. The master will make him give me his cow. His cow is a fine beast, much better than all of ours!"

So he went to the landlord and complained about his brother:

"He took my bread," he said, "what with one thing and another, and never gave anything back. So," he said, "I must get his cow in payment of what he took from me!"

So the landlord called the poor brother:

"Now," he said, "you so and so, do you owe your brother anything?"

"No," says the poor man, "I don't owe him a thing! I never took anything from him!"

So the landlord says:

"We must," he says, "judge both sides fairly." But the rich brother insists that the poor one owes him a lot, and the landlord begins to wonder what is to be done; he does not know whom to favour in his judgement. At last he says:

"Now, listen to me," he says, "I'll ask you three riddles; if the rich brother guesses them, he'll get the poor brother's cow. If the poor brother guesses them, then the rich brother's seven cows go to him!"

And he gives them the following riddles to guess:

"What is the best thing in the world? "

"What is the fastest thing in the world? "

"What is the best fed thing in the world? "

So now both brothers go home. The poor one goes crying bitterly all the way and the rich one laughs joyfully till he gets home. When he comes home, he says to his wife:

"Well, wife," he says, "the landlord gave us three riddles to answer."

"And what," says the wife, "are the riddles thou must answer? "

"The first one," he says, "is: 'What is the best thing in the world? ' "

"Eh!" says the wife, "I can guess that, it's easy," she says, "there's nothing better ever in the whole world than our life together: we never quarrel, we always agree about everything, don't we? "

"The second riddle," says the husband, "is: What is the fastest thing in the world? "

"Eh," says the wife, "that's easier still; our stallion is well fed and strong, he runs faster than anything in the world. Now, isn't that right? " says the wife.

"The third riddle," says the husband, well pleased with her answers, "is: What is the best fed thing in the world? "

"Eh," says the wife, "that is the easiest of all. Nobody has a hog like ours; nobody has such a well-fed hog! "

"Seems thou hast guessed all three riddles, wife," says the rich brother, very pleased with his wife.

"Sure I've guessed right," she says, "all my answers are right! "

Well, in the meantime the poor brother comes home crying bitterly and his daughter begins to question him:

"Why," says she, "dost thou cry so bitterly, pa dear? "

"What can I do, daughter? " says the poor man, "the master told us to guess three riddles; if I don't guess them, I'll have to give our cow to my brother. Now listen to them: first – What is the best thing in the world?

second – What is the fastest thing in the world?

third – What is the best fed thing in the world?

God only knows how to guess the answers to these riddles! "

"Eh, pa, dear! " says the daughter, "go to bed and sleep," she says, "tomorrow will be another day and will bring an answer to all your riddles."

So they went to bed and slept the night through. In the morning the poor brother says:

"Now daughter," he says, "get up and give me the answers to the three riddles."

"Well, pa, dear," says the daughter, "the answer to the first riddle about the best thing in the world is – sleep. All your troubles are forgotten when you sleep! The fastest thing in the world is – thought. You think where you stand and lo! at the same moment your thought carries you to some far away place. The answer to the third riddle is: the best fed thing in the whole world is the earth. It is better fed and richer than anything else. All the people in the world live and feed off what the earth gives them! "

Well, now the rich brother arrives and says:

"Come on, there! you haven't guessed those riddles, but I have. So, let's go to the master! "

The poor brother is not very eager to go, but there is nothing else he can do. So off they both go to the landlord. The landlord says:

"Well, rich man, come up nearer! Have you guessed the answers to my riddles? "

"Why, yes, Master," says the rich brother, "I have guessed the answers all right! "

"So, what is your answer to the first riddle? "

"Well," says the rich man, "there is nothing better in the world than our life with my wife – we never quarrel, we always agree about everything."

"And what is the fastest thing in the world? " says the landlord.

"Why, the fastest thing in the world," says the rich brother, "is our young stallion; there's nothing in the world can outrun him."

"And what about the best fed thing in the world?" asks the landlord.

"Why, the best fed thing in the world," says the rich brother, "is our hog; he is well fed, all right; you should see how fat he is! Sure enough, he is the best fed thing in the world!"

The landlord stands there, listening to the rich brother's answers, then he turns to the poor brother:

"Well," he says, "and what about you? Have you guessed the answers to my riddles?"

"Ah! the good Lord only knows if I have guessed them right or wrong!" says the poor brother.

"Let's hear your answers," says the landlord.

"Well," says the poor man, "the best thing in the world is sleep; the fastest is thought, and the best fed," he says, "is the earth."

"So," says the landlord, "there you are!" he says to the rich brother, "you, rich one, haven't guessed the answers to my riddles; the poor one," he says, "has guessed them right! So now you'll give him your seven cows!"

The rich brother begins to break his head, to find a way out and not give his seven cows away. But what can he do? The master has said he must give them to his brother and there is nothing he can do.

"Well," he says, "let's go!"

Just as they are leaving the landlord says:

"Hey, there!" he says, "you, poor peasant, come back here!"

So the poor brother turns back and the landlord says:

"Tell me," he says, "how did you guess the answers to my riddles?"

"I have a daughter," says the poor peasant, "and she told me the answers to your riddles."

"Well," says the landlord, "she sure is a bright girl, here," he says, "take these seven boiled eggs, tell her to hatch chickens out of them during the night, and once the chicks are hatched, to prepare one for me for dinner!"

So the poor peasant takes the seven boiled eggs and goes home, crying bitterly. When he gets home he says to his daughter:

"Well, daughter, take these seven eggs, hatch out seven chicks during the night, then send one to the landlord for his dinner," says he.

He cries bitterly, but the daughter says:

"Stop crying, pa! Tomorrow, God willing, will be another day, and we'll surely see some way out. We'll manage somehow", she says, "don't cry!"

By the way, his daughter was a cripple: she sat all day, for her legs did not obey her. Everything she said she was told to say by the angels.

So they went to bed and next day the poor peasant asked his daughter what he should do. "I'll tell thee," says the girl, "I have a handful of grain here. Take it to the master, give it to him and tell him to clear a piece of land, plough it during the night, sow the grain, then harvest the crop, thresh it and send it to me to feed the chick for his dinner..."

So the poor peasant goes to the landlord and gives him the handful of grain:

"Here, master," he says, "my daughter sends you this grain and asks you to clear some land and plough it, then sow the grain, harvest it and thresh it, and send it to her to feed the chick for your dinner!"

The landlord is very surprised and says:

"How is it that your daughter is so bright?" he says.

The poor peasant answers:

"Well, I don't know," he says. "God knows how it is," he says, "surely it is He, who made her bright!"







*Meanwhile
his wife sharpens the knife,
spits three times
under the stove,
with such energy
that she fills the devil's eyes with spit
(you remember,
he is sitting under the stove,
watching),
and then goes up to her old man.
She barely manages
to take him
by the beard
when the old man grabs her by her hair
and starts swearing at her
in a most terrible manner,
and beating her
with his free hand.
The woman
screams
with all her might:
"Oh! dear, oh! please, somebody come and save me,
he's killing me! "
The old man
continues to thrash her,
as if she were a horse.
"You'll see
what I do to you,
you daughter of a b...!
I'll show you
how to cut
your husband's throat! "
He nearly beats the life out of her,
if it weren't for the neighbours,
who come and save her.
The devil,
by that time,
feels as happy as a king.
He gets out
from under the stove,
rubs his eyes clean of the spit in them,
and wags his tail gleefully.
Then
he goes to see his female friend
and takes her
the money
he owes her.
He drags a whole bag full of it along.*

So the landlord says then:

"How do you expect me to clear the land, plough it, sow, grow, harvest and thresh the grain in one night? It can't be done!" he says.

"Well, master," says the poor peasant, "if you can't grow the grain in one night," he says, "we can't hatch chicks out of boiled eggs and prepare them for your dinner, either!"

"All right," says the landlord, "go home and tell your daughter to come to see me tomorrow; tell her to wear nothing and not to drive anything; tell her neither to wear a shirt, nor to come naked, neither to ride across fields or along the road, to bring me a present which I won't get. If she does as I say, I'll marry her!"

The poor man goes home crying bitterly.

"Ah! What's wrong now, pa dear?" says the daughter.

"The master," says the father, "wants thee to go to his house tomorrow; thou mustn't wear anything, nor drive in anything; thou mustn't wear a shirt, but thou mustn't be naked, thou mustn't ride across the fields or along the road; but thou must take him a present he won't get. Then he'll marry thee!"

"Well," says the girl, "go thou and ask somebody to give me a goat and some meshed cloth; I'll wind it round me, I'll harness the goat into our handcart and go in it to the master's house."

The father got her the cloth and the goat. She harnessed it into the handcart, wound the cloth round her body, took her cat into her arms and drove – neither along the road, nor over the fields, but straight through his garden and orchard. So she went, breaking things on her way. The landlord got frightened.

"Who's that there?" he cried. "Oh! it's the girl I told to come!"

And he immediately ordered the dogs to be let loose, so they would tear the girl to pieces. The dogs dashed at her, but she threw the cat at them! The cat went up the apple tree, the dogs immediately ran howling after it.

The girl, in her handcart driven by the goat, rode right into the landlord's room!

"Well, now," says she, "you'll have to marry me, master! See, I've come without anything on, riding on nothing, no shirt, yet not naked; I came neither along the road, nor over the fields, I brought you a present, but your dogs chased it away and you could not get it!"

And all of a sudden she got up, quite healthy and very lovely she was.

So the landlord married her.

The rich brother gave the poor one the seven cows, so the poor peasant began to live happily with his wife.

They may be living so even now, for all we know...

The Devil and the Female

Once upon a time there lived an old man with his old woman. They lived peacefully together, they never quarrelled with each other. They had lived so all their life and reached a quiet and happy old age. The devil yearned to tempt them to do something bad somehow. For twelve years he sat under their stove and never could he do a single thing to disturb the goodwill between the couple. Besides he was half starved and looked terrible – just skin and bones. The old man and his old woman continued to live in peace and to praise the Lord. The devil had practically decided to leave the old people alone, and try and tempt other people, when once he heard somebody say: where the devil can't get his way he'll send a woman to do the job. So the devil heard this and went to look for such a woman, a woman that might confuse and disturb this good couple. It didn't take him long to find such a female: he just poked his nose outside the door when he saw one

running after a man, her skirts tucked way up, brandishing a poker in one hand. She caught up with the unfortunate fellow and began beating him with all her might over the head and wherever else she could hit, screaming all the time at the top of her voice, for all the village to hear:

"I'll show thee, thou bastard! ... I'll show thee how to carry our grain to the pot-house... I'll show thee, thou good-for-nothing. Thou won't hide from me. I'll do whatever I think fit. Or hast thou, maybe, forgotten that a woman can outwit the very devil?!"

So the devil sees the woman beating the man, and he is ever so pleased.

"There," he thinks, "that woman will do anything she sets her mind on; one must only find a way to get around her."

So the devil, in his desire to win the fierce female's attention, seizes the man by the scruff of the neck, in order to hold him still.

"You so-and-so, you!" screams the enraged female at the devil. "Don't you dare meddle into other people's affairs, take care of your own! What are you doing there with your nose stuck into somebody's behind?!" And she begins thrashing the devil with the poker. The devil can barely manage to get out of her hands and run for his life. He is only able to catch his breath when he reaches the outskirts of the field; so he stands there, scratching himself and moaning pitifully, for the angry female has nearly busted all his bones. He stands there a while and then goes back to the village. There he finds the woman and starts begging her to help him tempt those good people into doing something bad.

"All right," agrees the woman, "only you'll have to give me a hatful of coins for my work."

The devil promises to give her a hat brimful of money, if she manages to make the old man and his wife quarrel.

"Hah!" says the woman, "I'll manage it so, that tomorrow the old man'll not only curse and swear at his old woman, but'll drag her around by her hair."

The devil is ever so pleased. He returns to the old people's hut and gets back into his old place under the stove. There he sits and waits, to see what the fierce female will do. And then he sees her running with a pail, as if by chance, alongside with the good old man's wife. They stop in the middle of the road and begin, as usual, to chatter. As usual, because as soon as two women meet, they'll chatter till they've done with every neighbour around them. So our two women begin to discuss their husbands—whether they love them, whether their life is easy with them.

"My husband," says the fierce female, "though he likes the bottle and can swear like none other, and, maybe, isn't very respectful, loves me, how he loves me! ..."

The other woman says that they live in such concord with her husband, that she can only wish the same for all other people.

"Maybe your husband don't really love you, if he don't swear at you, or beat you? Maybe he's unable to?" On saying this the nasty female bends close to her neighbour's ear and whispers something into it.

"Why, you're right", says the wife of the good old man sorrowfully, "that's my misfortune."

"Eh-he! There, there, don't fret. Just say the word and I'll tell you what to do, you'll see how it works!"

"Oh! I'm 'fraid it may turn out all wrong..."

"Nah! It won't, don't you fret, just listen to me. And do what I say. Now all your trouble is because your husband has some tough hairs, growing under his beard, now if you could only cut them off, but without telling him, of course, then you'd be so happy, so happy, that everybody'd just envy you."

"How can I cut off the hairs, so my husband won't know about it?"

"Now, listen carefully. Buy some vodka, fry some eggs and let your man eat and drink. Then he'll go to bed and fall asleep. Then you take a knife, sharpen it on the stove door,

spit three times under the stove, then go and cut out those dry hairs under his beard. They're easy to find — they grow the wrong way! "

"Oh! thank you," says the old woman.

"But see you do it today, and when tomorrow comes you'll thank me again: you'll be happy then, he won't let you sleep a wink all night, just as when you were young, ha-ha-ha! ..." And the nasty female laughs and goes off about her business.

Well, just as the sun begins to set behind the forest, the wife of the good old man runs to the pot-house, buys a pint of the strongest vodka, goes home and starts frying the eggs. Meanwhile, the nasty female meets the good old man and tells him that his wife is going to cut his throat that night. The old man simply can't believe it, but she swears and swears it's true.

"You'll see," she says, "how she'll try to make you drunk and then, when you go to bed, she'll cut your throat. You'll see. As soon as you get home, she'll put fried eggs on the table and a pint of vodka. That's so you may get drunk and not notice that she wants to do her evil job. Well, you just make believe that you are asleep, and you'll see what she'll do."

"You lie, you filthy trollop, you! Why'd my wife want to cut my throat, when we live so well together," says the good old man and hurries home to tell his wife all about it, but as soon as he steps over the threshold he sees that she is frying eggs in a big pan, and so he keeps silent. "Well, well," he thinks, "maybe that nasty female was not lying, after all."

So he pretends that he knows nothing, to see what will come of it all. So he sees that his wife fries the eggs and puts them on the table before him with a pint of vodka.

"There you are."

"Why, what's the meaning of such a treat, wife? Is today some festive day, or what? "

"Nah! it's our neighbour who gave me the vodka. Drink it up, it's good stuff."

So he drinks some three small glasses of vodka, eats the eggs, then goes over to the bench, lies down and pretends to go to sleep.

He lets out a snore, but keeps one eye half open to see what is going on. And, lo! he sees his wife take a carving knife and begin sharpening it on the stove. "Well, well," he thinks, "so that vile female told the truth after all."

Meanwhile his wife sharpens the knife, spits three times under the stove, with such energy that she fills the devil's eyes with spit (you remember, he is sitting under the stove, watching), and then goes up to her old man. She barely manages to take him by the beard when the old man grabs her by her hair and starts swearing at her in a most terrible manner, and beating her with his free hand.

The woman screams with all her might:

"Oh! dear, oh! please, somebody come and save me, he's killing me! "

The old man continues to thrash her, as if she were a horse.

"You'll see what I do to you, you daughter of a b...! I'll show you how to cut your husband's throat! "

He nearly beats the life out of her, if it weren't for the neighbours, who come and save her. The devil, by that time, feels as happy as a king. He gets out from under the stove, rubs his eyes clean of the spit in them, and wags his tail gleefully. Then he goes to see his female friend and takes her the money he owes her. He drags a whole bag full of it along.

The nasty female is, of course, expecting him and has prepared an empty barrel, that she's turned upside down. She's cut out a hole in the bottom of the barrel (that is now with its bottom upwards) and put over it a worn hat with a hole in it, too. The devil begins to pour the coins into the hat but can't seem to fill it. However, he is a bright devil and knows where more coins are hidden. So he flies there, and comes back with more. He continues to pour them out, but still the hat remains empty. So the devil lifts the hat a mite, and sees that the woman has outwitted him. As soon as he understands that, he rushes at her with fists lifted, ready to beat her. The woman grabs the oven prongs and shrieks:

"Well, you scoundrel, come on and I'll punch your eyes out for you." The devil gets 109

frightened and jumps over the fence, and the fierce female rushes after him. The devil tries to defend himself with a picket out of the fence.

"There," says the woman, "you make one hole in me with your picket and I'll make two in you with the prongs."

"Let's swap," says the devil.

"Let's."

So they swap weapons and begin fighting again. Every time the woman goes at him through the fence with the picket she gets him nicely. While the devil, with each blow of the prongs, gets them stuck in the fence. So the devil sees he can do nothing with the woman, but that she, certainly, will make a sieve out of him very soon, and he begins to beg:

"Wait, woman; let's make up. I'll give you another bag of coins, only just tell me one thing: in what does a woman's strength abide?"

"I'll tell you, when you bring the money," says the woman.

Off goes the devil, flying for more money, and very soon he comes back, dragging a bagful. He gives the bag to her and says:

"Well, so where does your strength abide, woman?"

"Right here," says the fierce female, lifting the hem of her dress. The devil goes cross-eyed with surprise and jumps right under the woman's skirts and hides himself there: they only move a mite. And ever since the devil and the woman seem to have become one person. Men try their best to get him out with the help of a picket but, unfortunately, in this case they are quite helpless.

Mikhei, the Tailor, and Martin, the Shoemaker

Many, many, many years ago two handicraftsmen met in a far-away kingdom; one of them was Martin, a shoemaker, the other — Mikhei, a tailor. So they met and started talking to each other.

"What's thy trade, old chap?" asks Martin. Mikhei says:

"Well, for one thing I c'n take the eggs out from under a wild duck that's hatching them in her nest and she'll never know the difference, never even budge from the nest!"

So they went off to look for a wild duck and found one quite soon. Mikhei got the eggs away from under her and she never even budged. While he was getting the eggs from under the duck Martin cut the soles off both his boots and Mikhei never even noticed it. Well, then they walked a little way and Martin says:

"Mikhei, old chap, have thy boots got two soles to them?"

"Nah! Only one!"

"Have a look, then, do," says Martin, "there's none to them now!"

So Mikhei looked at his boots and saw that they had no soles to them. Well, Martin took the soles out of his pocket, and fixed them to Mikhei's boots.

"Now," he says, "Mikhei, old chap, suppose the duck was asleep when thou took the eggs from under it; but then thou wert'n't asleep when I cut off the soles of thy boots, wert thou?"

So Mikhei thought a bit and said:

"Well, Martin, old chap, sure 'nough, I was awake. Tell thee what: let's live together, as good comrades, in complete concord. Only let's go away to some nice town, or city even, not just any place!"

So they went to a town and found themselves lodgings. As they both were handicraftsmen — you remember, Martin was a shoemaker and Mikhei a tailor — they hired a nice place to live in and lived and worked there, one made boots, the other — clothes. For one

was a shoemaker and the other — a tailor. So they lived for a time, then Martin thought a bit and said:

"Why," he said "must we work, old boy? Let's go'nd see if we can't steal something".

"Where," asked Mikhei, "c'n we go'nd steal something?"

Martin, the shoemaker, answered:

"Where? we c'n go," he said, "to the king's vault! "

So they went to the king's vault, broke it open, poured wine into a trough and mixed some flour into it and gave it to the dogs to lap up. The dogs lapped it up greedily. After that the two friends tied them in twos by their tails and hanged them over the wall. Then Mikhei went and stood on guard, while Martin began to steal — he took everything that he thought might be useful. Then, finally, before leaving the vault he took the king's fur coat.

Then they went home and began to divide the loot between them. They divided everything except the fur coat — they simply could not divide that. Martin said:

"I stole it — the fur coat is mine! " Mikhei said:

"I stood on guard while thou stole. So it's mine! Well, then, if we can't divide it, let's go and tell the king about our quarrel and see what he says: who's to get the fur coat — the one who stole it, or the one who stood on guard".

So they went to the king. He was asleep on the second floor. So they stood under his window. The king had a story-teller, who told him tales. You know how it is, the king sleeps and the story-teller tells him tales. But the story-teller also dozed off just then, so the two friends climbed up to the king's room and asked the king:

"Your very highest highness! Thieves got into the vault, took all they could lay hands on, and at last took the king's fur coat. They managed to divide everything between them, except the fur coat — they just couldn't divide that. Then they came to your very highest highness to ask: who gets the fur coat? The one who stole it, or the one who stood on guard? "

Now the king thought that it was his story-teller, telling him a tale and asking for an answer. So he says:

"Well, certainly the coat must not go to the one who stood on guard. You see, the one who stood on guard could have run away and then the one who stole the coat would have been caught. Most certainly it should go to the one who stole it! "

So the two friends quietly got out of the king's room and went home.

"There now," said Martin on the way, "so, old boy, the coat goes to the one who stole it!"

So they returned to their lodgings; in the meantime the king listens hard, but does not seem to hear his story-teller; his story-teller is fast asleep and has not heard a thing — he has not heard the thieves that came to see the king, nor what they asked him about, he did not hear that either. So the king says:

"Now then, story-teller, tell me that tale you just told me once more! " The story-teller begins to tell the king a tale, but it is quite a different one.

"No," says the king, "not that! I want to hear the one you were just telling me."

But the story-teller had not heard it and couldn't know what it was about. So he began to tell quite another tale.

"No, no, not that! The one you told me just now about the thieves that got into the king's vault and couldn't divide the king's fur coat between them! "

But the story-teller does not seem to know any such tale.

"Well, well," says the king, "seems to me there's something fishy there, what do you say, story-teller? Send the sentry to revise the vault! "

So the sentry marches off to see whether all is well with the vault and finds the dogs tied together in twos by their tails, hanging over the wall, and the vault wide open.

So he marches back to the king and says:

"Thieves got into your vault," he says.

Then day-break comes and the king hears that somehow or other people have got to

know that the thieves that robbed the vault later paid him a visit, and the people begin to laugh at him — they say that he himself gave his fur coat to them. By the way, one of the things the king disliked most was to be laughed at — it made him feel fidgety. So he thought a bit, then ordered two of his soldiers to get a goat and walk the animal up and down the streets of the town between them.

"If there are thieves about," he says, "they'll certainly get the goat away from you."

So the soldiers got a goat and trudged up and down the streets with it all day long; then, finally, they tied it to a post and went into a pot-house and drank a pot of beer each. You see, they trudged about all day long so they were very thirsty. Well, while they were having their pot of beer, the two friends cut the rope by which the goat was tied to the post and went off with the animal. So when the two soldiers came out of the pot-house there was no goat at the post. They did not know what to do now — there was no goat and no thieves around, so they went back to the king.

"Where's the goat? "

"It's gone! "

"And the thieves? "

"We didn't see any thieves! "

"Well, well," says the king, "that's really very interesting. How did you manage to lose the goat and the thieves, I wonder! "

"Well," say the soldiers, "it happened like this: first we heard a fearful noise, then something like a gust of wind blew past, then something like a knife cut the rope we were holding, and then the goat disappeared! "

The king sat and thought a while.

"Well, now listen to me carefully," he says, "go, get me goat's meat. Even if it costs you five roubles a pound you get me goat's meat. The thieves won't eat goat's meat themselves, they'll sell it. Never mind what it costs — buy at least three pounds of it. Whoever sells goat's meat is the thief."

So, next day early in the morning, the soldiers marched off to buy goat's meat. They found it quickly enough and bought it. When they left the house with it, one of them wrote on the gate: "We bought goat's meat here." Some minutes later Martin left the house to have a look around and what do you think he saw? Why the words about goat's meat on their gate, of course.

So he goes back and says:

"Well, Mikhei, old chap, things seem to look bad for us: knowest thou what somebody wrote on our gate? that they bought goat's meat here! "

"Eh! don't let it worry thee," says Mikhei, "let's walk up the street — go thou on one side of it, I'll go on the other — and we'll write on all the gates of all the houses: 'We bought goat's meat here!' "

So they up and went along the street and wrote on every gate "We bought goat's meat here", while the soldiers were hurrying with the meat to the king.

"Well," says the king, "have you found the thieves? "

"Yes!" they say, "come with us and we'll show you. We wrote on their gate."

So they march off with the king to see the gate. And of course you guess what they see: they see the same words "We bought goat's meat here" written on all the gates along the street — the very same words on every gate! Certainly not all the people who live in this street are thieves. One of them is, but not all of them. So they march back without having found the thief. So now all the people laugh even more at the king: some thief steals his fur coat, then goes off with the goat that marched up and down the streets between two soldiers, then somebody sells a lot of goat's meat and still no thieves are found! The king, of course, feels more fidgety than ever, and sits down to think. After thinking for a while he decides to give a big party: he invites all sorts of people to it, people of high standing and common folk, rich people and poor people, all are invited to

his party. Tables are laid, all kind of wines are set out, as well as good things to eat. On the floor, next to the tables the king drops some gold pieces and sets up sentries some way off to watch out for whoever bends down: whoever bends down — is the thief.

Well, they all eat and drink at the party and Martin (the thief) says:

"Eh, Mikhei, old chap! couldn't we just pick up those gold pieces from the floor?"

"But how c'n we pick'em up?" "Well, let's go home for a while!"

So they go home and put on big Russian boots, grease them well with cobbler's wax (the soles of the boots, you know). Then they go back to the party. No need to bend down, they simply walk over the gold pieces that immediately stick to the wax. So, the party ends, the gold pieces have disappeared and the thieves have not been caught.

Now certainly the people laugh at the king again. But the one who laughs hardest at the king is the priest: his fur coat was stolen, the goat was carried off, the goat's meat was bought from the thief, the gold pieces were picked up — yet nobody has been caught yet.

So the king sits down to think harder than ever, then orders a notice to be posted up: "I want to see the thieves. I forgive you everything you've done and will give you everything you ask for!" So they decide to go and see the king.

"Good day, your very highest highness!"

"Good day to you! Tell me, what sort of people are you?"

"Well, we've come to see you. We are the thieves that stole your fur coat, that led the goat away, that sold goat's meat to your soldiers and that picked up the coins at your party".

"Now, listen to me. I need your help, I want you to do something to the priest so that I can laugh at him as hard as he laughs at me all the time!"

The two friends put down a date on a piece of paper, for the king to remember and come to church on that date, to hear mass. Then, on the eve of that day they go to the priest's house and take with them a huge skin bag, that looks like a blacksmith's bellows; they catch a whole lot of crabs and put them into a smaller bag and prepare a whole lot of small, thin candles (really very small and very thin candles), one for each crab. All of these things they take along to the priest's house. Once they get there they light all the small, thin candles, and give one to each crab, to hold in its biggest claw. The crabs immediately squeeze their big claws and the two friends let them out into the priest's yard. So they begin to crawl about the priest's yard, each holding a lighted candle in its claw! The friends let out all the crabs and they crawl and crawl with the lighted candles. Then the two friends go up to the priest's window, push it open and put a lighted candle on each side of it. They themselves stand outside the window holding the huge skin bag into which they put a good number of pints of soot — like what comes out of the chimney. Then they begin to call out:

"Hu-llo-there-you-ser-vant-of-God! -Look!-God-has-sent-his-angels-to-sa-ve-your-soul!"

The priest awakens with a start and sees his yard all alight with little tongues of flame (that is, with the candles). And the two repeat again:

"Ser-vant-of-God! -God-has-sent-an-gels-to-sa-ve-your-soul!"

"Where must I go?" asks the priest in a trembling voice.

"Why, straight out of the window," they tell him, "everything is ready for you, just climb out!"

Well, out he goes, through the window. The two friends grab him, stuff him into the skin bag and take him to church. There they hang the bag next to the entrance. In the morning the king is to come to hear mass. So they hang the bag up, put a heavy club on it and write on a paper that they stick on the bag: "Whosoever hits the bag with the club will get God's indulgence; he who hits hardest will get more indulgence!"

Well, now, the king comes to mass in the morning and sees a skin bag hanging outside the church, with a club on it and a written paper that says: "Whosoever hits three times will get God's indulgence!" So he takes the club up and hits once. The priest only grits

his teeth! The king hits a second time — still there is silence; when he hits a third time the priest cannot stand the pain any longer and screams:

"Ouch! "

Well, the skin bag is immediately taken down and untied. The priest crawls out looking more like the devil than the devil himself — all covered with some one hundred pints of soot inside the bag. So now it is the king's turn to laugh:

"Well," he says, "so I gave away my fur coat, I lost the goat, I bought the goat's meat, I gave away the pieces of gold. But what about you? I thought you were supposed to say mass, but instead of saying mass, there you are, sitting in the skin bag! "

So after this the king gives the two thieves a clean ticket. "There," he says, "I forgive you everything you've done and give you a clean ticket of leave! ..."

Asilak

You 'll want to know exactly what Asilak means, of course. Well, it is the name given in our country to a man of legendary strength, a real superhero of a man, whose deeds are always directed to the good of his fellow-men.

So now that you know, let's get along with our story. Once upon a time, long, long ago, there lived an oldish man with his wife. They lived well together: they loved each other from early age, and, loving each other, they reached their mature years. Together they sorrowed and together they worked and together they rested. They were happy but for one thing: the Lord hadn't blessed them with a child of their own.

"Who'll give us a drink of water when old age comes?" the woman used to say, drying her tears with the corner of her apron.

"Don't cry, woman," the husband would say. "The Lord knows what He does, maybe He'll be merciful to us yet, in our old age? "

The wife would stop weeping. There were times when her eyes would twinkle happily, like a young woman's, although her face was all criss-crossed with wrinkles. It's well known that a person never stops hoping for happiness, for how can one live without hope? Young women often asked her to take care of their babies, but she always refused for she feared that when a baby of her own'd be born, people would make fun of him and call him granny's boy!

One day, when her old man was on the threshing-floor, the woman was frying pancakes. All of a sudden, a small ball of fire jumped through the window and started rolling about the hut. The woman didn't know what to do, for it rolled about the room then rolled right under her feet. She caught hold of her skirts and felt the ball of fire rolling between her feet. She had barely time to collect her senses when she felt enveloped by a queer feeling, a thrill that made her sit down. Then she stretched herself out right on the floor and lay there for quite a while. When she felt a bit better she got up and couldn't understand whatever had happened to her.

However, from this time on the woman began to want all sorts of different things to eat — it was always something, whether salted fish, or meat, or whatnot. Her old man was kept busy getting her the things she asked for. When she told the young women that she kept on wanting all kind of things to eat, they laughed and said that was how women felt when they were expecting babies! At first she simply wouldn't believe them, but then she began to grow big, and then she understood she was with child and nobody could have been happier.

Some time later she was delivered of such a fine baby boy, that everybody simply marvelled at him. When the women began to swaddle him they saw that he had four "devil's" ribs sticking out just like little hoops. The women were surprised, but then they decided that he'd probably be an Asilak. The little fellow grew and became stronger and stronger and very soon he was stronger than any of the strongest men around, none of whom could overcome him fighting. Finally the boy grew to be a regular legendary asilak.

When he himself felt his own strength he decided to go off and see the world. Nothing his parents said would convince him to stay and be their help in their old age.

"I have nothing to do here, with you, except — maybe — bring the hens and chickens home each evening. I'm going away to look for enemies and I'll either perish myself, or I'll destroy those enemies! "

Nothing doing — the old man and his wife fixed their son up for his journey and weeping bitter tears, went with him to the border of the village. There they said good-bye, as they could go no further: they got tired quickly, for they were old; they returned to their home. Asilak, for so he was called by all now, came up to a forest and rode right into it. The forest was dense and dark; he whistled shrilly when he was inside and the trees lost their leaves; the birds got a terrific fright and tried to hide on the leafless branches, the wild beasts also hid wherever they could. In this forest there lived seven brothers, seven robbers. And not a living soul could either go or ride through the forest. They never feared anyone, so when they heard the shrill whistle, they all went to fight Asilak. Meanwhile Asilak came to a glade, lit a fire and sat frying a piece of bacon on a stick. The robbers immediately surrounded him.

"Who are you, people, and what do you want? " asked Asilak.

"Who are you and how dared you come to our forest? " said the older of the robbers.

"Who I am, you'll know when we've tried our strength; the forest is not yours, it's God's. And He gave it to all the people."

"This is our forest, we are the landlords here. We have been here ever so long! "

"You are robbers. You've grabbed this forest for your own because you are brigands. I've come to take this God's forest away from you and give it to all the people."

"Well, aren't you powerful? ! Let's have a go at trying out our strength, to see whose is greater, what d'you say to that? "

"All right, let's! "

The eldest robber took an iron club weighing some ten poods and stood up with it facing Asilak, who glanced around, looking for some weapon. An oak-tree stood near by. It would have needed three men at least to get their arms around it. Asilak got a hold on the oak-tree and pulled it out with roots and all. The robbers, when they saw this, got real frightened and began to beg him not to kill them.

"Be our eldest, then we can rule the world! "

"No," said Asilak, "that's not what I've come for; I don't intend to rule the world, I want to free the world from the rule of the landlords, for each man should be his own lord. He who wants to stand above the people is my enemy."

Then the seven brothers, the seven robbers, began to beg him to take them as his comrades.

"All right," said Asilak.

So they went on together; first they came to one village, then to another, and wherever he went, Asilak always said the same thing: that all the people are their own masters and lords; that everything that God gave, He gave for all people to use. He would say: "Eat your bread and give some to others", or "live and let live." Everybody liked him, for, as you know, even dogs bite only if they are ill-treated.

Asilak taught people to live in friendship and in good-will towards each other.

"If you live so," he would say, "if you live in friendship, just as if you were one great man, one regular hero, you'll be stronger than all the regular heroes taken together, and no ill will ever befall you."

His words were repeated by those who heard him, and finally they spread out so through the world at large, that the landlords began to feel fear and tried to catch Asilak. They looked for him everywhere for quite a long time, however he always managed to be out of their reach. But it so happened that the seven brothers, the seven robbers, felt they'd also like to lord it over the common people, so they got together with the landlords and betrayed Asilak. You can well imagine how pleased the landlords were: they gave the

robbers a lot of money and things, called them brothers, and, in one word, stood up on their hind legs before them, begging them to help catch the rebellious Asilak. Well, the robbers began to speak to the people, to try by all kind of means, to make them give Asilak up to them. They wheedled some, they threatened others, and yet others they simply made drunk. There's no doubt that, whatever else, there are plenty of bad people about. Well, just such bad people turned up and told the landlords where they'd find Asilak. So the landlords got some soldiers together, and everyone knows that if those devils are paid well, they'll not stop at anything, they'll even kill their own father, if they are paid to do it! Asilak knew nothing of this, of course, and once, when he lay down to rest, the soldiers fell on top of him up with strong ropes and took him to the landlords. A lot of people came after Asilak — they were mighty sorry for him, but what could they do? They were unable to fight those devils of soldiers and get Asilak away from them, so they just followed the solidiers into the courtyard, the men with heads lowered, the women — weeping and calling to God, repeating in their grief: "How can we live if you leave us? There's nobody will say a kind word to us! "

Meanwhile the landlords appeared: there were ever so many of them there, howling like a hungry pack of wolves for they got their enemy all tied up and brought to them, at last. They rubbed their hands gleefully, they laughed and chattered, choosing the best way to get rid of Asilak. One of them suggested skinning him alive, another — sticking nails into his body, a third proposed to hang him by the tongue, a fourth wanted to cut his tongue out and smash up his legs and feet, so that he'd stop talking to people, and walking about the country, teaching people how to live. While they were busy inventing all kind of horrors for Asilak, he pulled himself together and broke loose from the ropes, that dropped down and lay around him. Then he spoke to the people that had followed him into the landlord's yard; he said:

"Brothers and friends, just remember: the devil may take the landlords any day he likes — and no harm done! But without the poverty-stricken muzhik — there'd be no bread! To overcome the evil brought us by the landlords you've got to remember: never harm each other either by word or by deed, always stand together, as one man, against the common enemy."

Those were Asilak's last words; after he said them, he dwindled away and only a small ball of fire remained which then rolled away. The landlords and their soldiers got very frightened: they stood there, just gaping at each other and about them in great fear. People say that Asilak is still going around, teaching everybody friendliness and good will towards each other. Of course, there are still many muzhiks that keep on fighting between themselves, that still bow low to the landlords, that do everything against their own good. However mark my word, a day 'll come when each one will be his own lord, when equality between people will be achieved, when Asilak's words will come true!

A Lesson for the Landlord

Now listen carefully! I'm not telling you a story but only the truth, and nothing but the truth. I don't remember where it happened — you see, old age is to blame for that. Everybody knows that if the hair begins to fall from the forelock — memory also starts disappearing from the head. Now, fr'instance, I've forgotten what I'd for dinner today. I simply don't remember. It might even be that I'd nothing at all. You don't remember of course, how bad it was before, though it wasn't so far back, when the landlords governed us. It was all right if the landlord was good. Then it was simply fine, nobody called for death as a deliverance. A good landlord took care of his muzhiks, as if he was their father. But tell me, how did one come across such good landlords, when most of 'em were much more like beasts, than like people? Well, I tell you, if you come across *such* a landlord,

you c'n just as well lie down and die. You'll never do anything to please him. People used to say: "You close the door to the devil, but he'll get in through the window!"

Ah! there were some bad landlords all right. You work and work for him, you do your best to satisfy him, but no, he'll always scream and swear at you:

"Not like that, you fool, you good-for-nothing, you son of a b...", and he goes on and on, screaming and swearing and calling you names; no respect for anyone...

And the least something — well he'd have your skin thrashed off you. Oh, life was hard, so very hard, with a bad landlord. And if you come to look at things as they were, well all landlords were bad — so there!

Now, once there was such a bad landlord that it is barely possible to tell you about the things he did, how he humiliated his people! He whipped both men and women, both old and young. His servants would bring a young woman or a girl into the courtyard, and say:

"Here you are, Master."

"Well, just give it to her *there*," and the coachman would start flogging the girl, like the very devil.

Several people were flogged to death, and he was afraid of no one. He treated people much worse than dogs.

What he did to young women and girls, well, you've never heard of such shameful things. So there came a time when he couldn't think of anything new to scoff and jeer at people, and taunt them. So he ordered the muzhiks to come right up to his courtyard to sell oxen, and fixed the road so, that they couldn't pass his house, so as to sell their oxen to some other buyer. So they'd no way out but to bring the oxen to sell to him, I mean to this landlord. Someone'd bring an ox around and the landlord'd say:

"Well, you ass, and what d'you think you've brought? That's not an ox — it's a billy-goat! " He wouldn't even pay the price of a billy-goat, but just sent the muzhik to the stables and had him flogged nicely. The poor muzhiks suffered all these tortures and insults in silence, for what else could they do? Whom could they go to? You know how all the landlords always stand together.

But as it often happens there came a man who gave this cruel landlord his due and paid for all the tears and misery he'd caused the people. And this is how it happened. We had a handsome, stately, bold young fellow among us. He became an orphan at an early age, but even all by himself he toiled hard and husbanded his land well. A fine young fellow he was. Nobody ever touched him, never raised a hand against him. Well, once he comes to the landlord's courtyard with his ox for sale. The landlord sees him from the window, comes out onto the porch and says:

"Well, you ass, what d'you think you've got? That's not an ox, certainly, it's a billy-goat! "

The young fellow looks around, sees there's nobody near at hand, shows him a fine birch rod and says:

"Well, now, master, what is this I have in my hand? Is it a birch or is it, maybe, a rod? Or wouldn't you know the difference? So you can't see that I've brought you an ox and not a billy-goat? "

And he gave it hot to the landlord with that birch rod. He beat him until he was quite satisfied.

"There, master, that's for all the misery and suffering you bring our people. If you get over this thrashing expect me again, soon. Then I'll take the skin off you."

He said that to the landlord, and ran off and hid in the forest. In those days the forests were ever so thick and ever so dark. You could live there as long as you liked, nobody could touch you, and the forest would always feed you.

The servants found the landlord unconscious — the young fellow thrashed him nicely. He came to his senses on the third day after the thrashing, and ordered to catch Rymsha — that was the young fellow's name. Well, easier said than done. There wasn't a sign of him

anywhere. The landlord couldn't get up for several weeks. A lot of doctors were called in to see him — none could do a thing for probably Rymsha had beaten up his liver.

You see, what a muzhik can stand, during a thrashing, a master surely can't.

Well, some time passed and a hungarian doctor came to this landlord's place. He had every kind of medicine with him, for all kind of sickness. You can imagine how pleased the landlord was, how he begged the hungarian to doctor him. So the hungarian first made himself comfortable in the servants' quarters and then started doctoring the master. First of all he told the servants to heat up the bath-house, took the landlord there, made him sit down on the bench and told him to get hold of a small bar in the wall, and to hold it tight with both hands. He then began to smear him all over with all sorts of ointments and liniments. So the landlord sits there, holding on for dear life with both hands and groaning all the while. He doesn't sit so there for long, though, for the hungarian doctor gets a piece of rope out of his bag and ties the landlord's hands tight to the bar, then he pushes a rag into his mouth, takes up a switch and says:

"So what will this be, Master? Is it a birch or a rod? It was an ox I sold you, you know, not a billy-goat."

The landlord looks up and sees that the hungarian doctor is simply Rymsha. He tries to scream, but he can't, for there's a rag in his mouth, you remember. So he twists and twirls like a dry pea on a hotstove, while Rymsha gets a whip from under his coat and starts flogging the rascally landowner wherever he can hit him. He floggs and floggs, practically floggs off all his skin, then gets some salt out of the bag and starts rubbing it in. The landlord is senseless by this time — the pain is so great. Meanwhile, Rymsha gets his horses out and rides off. And not a soul knows where he rides to!

This time the landlord was ill for nearly half a year. Everyone thought it was the end of him.

But, you know, evil people don't die so easily: by spring he was a bit better and decided to go abroad to a water resort, a spa, they call it, but there wasn't enough money for that. So he decided to sell his timber. People heard about it and came to see the forest. But the landlord asked too much, nobody wanted to pay such an amount. Finally a merchant came, that seemed to be very rich. The landlord took him personally to see the forest. The landlord praised his timber to high heaven, but the merchant paid little heed to what he said, and took him farther and farther into the thick forest. They found themselves in such a place at last, that they couldn't even see the light of day. And here the merchant began to hug a pine-tree, and measure its thickness with a yardstick. The landlord also threw his arms around a pine-tree, and before you could wink an eye-lid, the merchant grabbed a rope out of his bag and tied him firmly to the tree. The landlord, of course, understands right away that this has nothing to do with the measurements of the trees; he wants to scream for help, but finds that he has lost his voice, from sheer fright. And then the merchant shows him a birch rod and asks in a voice that causes the landlord to go all limp:

"Now, what is this? Is it a birch or a rod? Remember," he says, "I sold you an ox, not a billy-goat."

Well, here the landlord understands immediately that it is Rymsha, and pisses into his boots — he's so frightened. Rymsha, meanwhile, gets some moss and stuffs it into the man's mouth; then he starts flogging him; at the same he keeps on repeating that he should stop humiliating people. So he floggs the landlord within an inch of his life, then leaves him there, tied to the pine-tree like a piece of carrion. So the landlord hangs on to the pine-tree all evening and the whole night long; he's nearly eaten up by ants and gnats, when his servants find him there. Now it takes him a year to get better, but still he can't get quite well, just can't get his strength back. So he once again decides to go to a water resort, in other words, to a spa.

He finally sells his timber, gets quite a pot of money for it and begins to prepare for his trip. Meanwhile Rymsha keeps an eye on him. As soon as the landlord leaves his







Then,
I see on the other side of the river,
a pack of wolves've
got hold of my bee
and are choking it to death;
the bee tries to fight'em off
and I, naturally,
run faster to help it.
Well,
I come to the river'nd
there's no raft to cross it,
'nd I see my bee
being well-nigh
torn to pieces.
So, what do I do?
I catch hold of my shock of hair,
I swing myself around
and around — and — well,
I tell you
I feel all queer —
and I send myself flying over the river."
"Well,"
says the master,
"that may be so, of course."
"But the thing is
that I swing myself
so hard
that I land waist deep
in the ground.
Well,
I start trying to get out,
but then I see
that I can't get out without a spade.
So, I say to myself,
there's no time to lose,
and I run home
for all I'm worth;
I grab a spade and run back,
and dig myself out,
and rush to help my bee."
"Well",
says the master,
"the world is a wide place.
That may well be the truth,
one never knows."
"So I run up to my bee,
get the wolves away from it,
but I see right away that it won't live:

property and turns towards the forest Rymsha is ready for him. He places two youngsters on horseback, at a small distance from each other on the road, each with a long birch rod in his hand. When the landlord approaches the first youngster begins to shake his rod and cry out:

"What is this, master? A birch or a rod?" and gallops off immediately on his horse.

"Catch him, catch him," shrieks the landlord. "It's that scoundrel Rymsha."

The coachman unharnesses the horses from the coach, and starts off on horseback after the youngster. But the boy streaks like lightning into the forest and the devil only knows where he goes to. Meanwhile the coachman rides like mad some ten miles straight along the road, and the other young fellow that was left on the road by Rymsha comes out into the open, shows his rod to the landlord and cries out:

"Now, master, what may that be? Is it a birch or a rod?"

"Catch him, hold him, the scoundrel!" screams the landlord to the flunkey. "Don't you see it's Rymsha?"

So the flunkey jumps astride the second horse and off he goes after the youngster. When the landlord is left alone Rymsha appears with a nice birch rod:

"What is this, master, a birch or a rod? Didn't I", he says, "sell you an ox, and not a billy-goat?"

And he begins flogging the landlord all over again. This time Rymsha beat him to pulp, then he took the money he had with him and went off to his hut in the forest. People say that after that Rymsha did a lot of good to the poor folk. Up to our days, in the dark forest, amid the marshes stands a hill, known as Rymsha's Hill. It stands between Zapoliye and Novoselki of the Mozyr region. You know people say that Rymsha lived there. They also say that he hid a lot of money there, but nobody can find it. I, myself, saw his hut when I went there, sent by the landlord with a map, to see whether I could find some of it.

Believe It or Not

There lived a landlord once upon a time, who loved to listen to tales. So once he called a muzhik and told him to tell him a tale. He said to him:

"Here's a plateful of gold: if you tell me a tale that won't have a word of truth in it, and if I say: 'you lie', then I'll give you this plateful of gold."

So the muzhik started weaving his tale:

"Well, master, one never knows what can happen in the world. Listen to what happened to me once. It was before I was born, I went to work for a master, to tend to his bees. He had fifty swarms of'em. Every time I'd count'em and let'em out to feed; when they came home, I'd to count them all over again, to milk'em, 'nd to put'em back into their hives."

"Well," said the master, "there's no telling, you know. The world is large and wide, and maybe what you tell me is true."

The muzhik cast a glance at the gold and went on:

"Once, it was kind'f early when I let the bees out to pasture. When they came back and I counted'em I saw that twelve were missing. What could I do? I thought, maybe they got stuck in the marshes... So I ran to look for them.

Off I went and of a sudden I see eleven bees flying, all bleeding and wounded, one of'em still missing. Well, I think, there's trouble ahead! ... So I go on and on. Then, I see on the other side of the river, a pack of wolves've got hold of my bee and are choking it to death; the bee tries to fight'em off and I, naturally, run faster to help it.

Well, I come to the river'nd there's no raft to cross it, 'nd I see my bee being well-nigh torn to pieces. So, what do I do? I catch hold of my shock of hair, I swing myself

· An Expensive Hide

Once upon a time there lived two brothers. One was poor, the other —rich. The poor brother had one old horse while the rich one had many fine horses. The poor brother once asked the rich one:

"Give me your horses to plough the field."

The rich brother did not want to give his horses, for he was very greedy; nevertheless he gave the poor brother one horse.

So the poor brother went to plough his field.

Meanwhile the rich brother cannot sit quietly at home, his heart aches when he thinks about his horse, ploughing his brother's field.

So he runs to the field and watches the poor brother.

Now everybody knows that when a peasant speaks to his beasts, he likes to use strong words:

"Giddyup, you good for nothing, may you fall dead! "

He does not use such words because he is angry, but just because he can't think of anything else, they are just words. The rich brother heard these words and thought that the poor brother was calling to death, to come for his horse. So he turned away and ran home, and got hold of an axe and killed his brother's old horse.

So the poor brother grieved and grieved for it, but what could he do? He took the hide off his old horse, dried it and went to sell it.

He walked and walked till darkness fell. Of a sudden he sees — a rich mansion, rising in front of him. So he thinks: "If the house is rich, then a lot of wonderful things may happen in it; maybe I can get something out of them."

So the poor brother peeps through the window and what do you think he sees? Well, first he sees that the landlord is not at home; then he sees that the priest is not at home; then he sees that the priest is having a good time with the landlord's wife. Then, of a sudden, there is the noise of wheels, thundering along the road, and this means that the landlord is coming home.

As soon as she hears the noise, the landlord's wife gets very frightened; she sends the priest to hide beneath the stove, shoves the food that is on the table into the oven, the liquor behind the cupboard.

Well, the poor peasant sees all this; so he goes to the landlord and asks him for permission to spend the night in his house. The landlord agrees and they both go into the house together. The wife begins to complain that she feels ill, that she did not light the stove and that there is nothing to eat in the house.

The poor peasant hears this and decides to fool her. He takes his horse's hide and begins beating it hard. The landlord, very much surprised, asks him what he is doing. The peasant answers:

"This is my way of telling fortunes," says the poor peasant. "This hide has told me that in the oven there is plenty of good food and liquor behind the cupboard."

Of course the landlord immediately goes to see and finds that the poor peasant has said the truth — there's food and liquor aplenty. So they eat and drink. Then the landlord asks the peasant:

"Tell me some more fortune."

The peasant says:

"I'd gladly tell your fortune, master, but you've got the devil sitting in your house, and he disturbs me! "

The landlord becomes frightened and asks the peasant to get the devil out of the house.

"All right, master; you give me a cart-load of grain and a couple of horses, and I'll throw the devil out of your house."

Of course the landlord agrees. So the poor peasant warms up some water on the stove and then splashes it under the stove. The priest has nowhere to go, the water is hot, there is plenty of soot under the stove and when he gets out he is black all over, just like the devil. So he gets out and runs for his life.

The landlord says:

"True enough, you've thrown the devil out of my house."

So the poor peasant gets a cart-load of grain and a pair of good horses for his service.

Well, he goes home. The rich brother is very astonished and asks:

"Where did you get all that wealth? "

"Why from the hide of the horse that you killed," answers the poor brother.

The rich brother is still more astonished and decides:

"I'll kill all my horses and go to town to sell them."

He goes home, and kills his horses.

Then he goes to town and cries out in a loud voice:

"I sell hides, I sell hides! "

"What price for them? "

"Well, two cart-loads of grain and four horses."

"You fool, who'll give you that! Better clear out of here before you get a beating! "

The rich peasant goes home and decides to kill his brother. He gets the axe and chops off his head. But, you see, their mother is sleeping today where the poor brother usually sleeps.

So it turns out that the rich peasant has killed their mother, not his brother.

The poor peasant grieves deeply and long, then harnesses his horse, fixes up his dead mother in a sitting position in the cart and drives off. He comes up to the landlord.

The landlord invites them both to come in, (you see, the dead mother is sitting up in the cart) but the "old" woman does not come into the house. So the landlord himself goes and takes a glass of wine up to her. He only barely touches her, when her head falls off. The peasant begins to scream. The landlord says:

"Shut up. There's two cart-loads of grain and four horses for you. Just bury her quietly."

The peasant does so, and then returns home. His rich brother asks:

"Where on earth'd you get all that wealth? "

"Oh," says the poor one, "I sold our mother at the fair and got all that grain."

Then the rich peasant decides to kill his wife and sell her.

He kills her, takes her to town, and cries out at the top of his voice:

"A dead body for sale; a dead body for sale."

People hear him and say:

"Shut up, you fool, run away or you'll get into real trouble. Take your dead home and bury her."

So he goes and buries his wife, but he's made up his mind to drown his poor brother. So he puts him into a sack and carries him off.

But then, on his way he remembers that he hasn't said his prayers. So he leaves the sack near the raft and runs off to church, to pray for the forgiveness of all his sins.

Just then who should go by the raft, but the landlord who is passing by with his herd of cows and swine. All of a sudden he hears the voice of the poor peasant:

"Miracles are happening! I'm being carried off to the skies! "

The landlord hears this and he feels a great desire to be carried off to the skies. The poor peasant says:

"Undo the sack, I'll get out and you'll get in, and you'll be taken to the skies instead of me."

So they change places. The rich peasant comes up by and by and drowns the sack with the landlord in it.

He goes back home and sees his poor brother walking along the road with a whole herd of animals behind him.

"Where on earth'd you get all that? "

"You threw me into the river, didn't you? There's a lot of everything down there. That's where I got all this from."

The rich brother hears this and runs off and jumps into the river. He was a queer one, you know. Never seemed to be satisfied with what he had. Always wanted more!

Soot

I came home with my pappy, after the first world war, to our native village; I had to go to work, for at home there was nothing at all to eat. So I went to a rich man and said:

"Give me some work to do."

He was well off: he had three pairs of horses. He also had boys working for him. So he didn't want to take me for pay.

I said to him:

"I don't need your money. I'll clean the chimney of your fire place'nd take the soot. Just make me a good casket (for the soot)."

The man thought I was a fool.

"Well," he said, "just live here, work for me, and I'll make you a casket, I will."

I was fourteen years old, but I was tall for my age and could work as a grown up. Finally my master came to like me better than the grown up boys he had. He made me a casket and I began to clean up his fire-places and to collect the soot in it. And I say to him:

"Well, master, in four months, if I collect this soot, maybe you'd give me horses to take it to the market."

The master only smiles. The boys say:

"What're you c'lecting soot for? Nobody'll buy it. You're a fool to work without pay."

"Now," I say to them, "I'm a fool; but maybe a time'll come when you all'll say how very bright I am."

The local priest often paid visits to my master's wife. As time passed, some three months later, (I'd collected half a casket of soot already), I forgot to lock up my casket, as I set off with master and the boys to plough the field. I always locked up my soot, but this time I didn't. The priest got to know that we'd gone to the field, so he went to visit the mistress.

So the mistress cooked and baked a lot of good stuff to eat. They drank some, and ate up the cooking. At that same time I was in the field with the master and asked him to let me go:

"You know what, master? You let me go home, will you? I've forgot to lock up my soot."

He says: "For heaven's sake, who's going to touch your soot? "

But I still ask him to let me go. "You know, master, I've worked for you for that soot nearly four months; and you know how well I work: better, even, than the big boys. If that soot of mine is stolen, my work'll be all lost, the work of four months."

The master says: "Run along, lock it up then, if you're afraid."

I run back to the house and stop under the window to hear what's going on there. I peep in and see the mistress feasting with the priest. Some twelve minutes later they lie down to sleep, both quite naked. I then go up to the door and knock. The priest jumps naked out of bed and cries out:

"What do I do now? "

They both begin to rush about every all way and finally see my casket standing unlocked in a corner. The mistress says:

"There's our youngster's casket — it's not locked, climb in."
Then she opens the door and asks me:
"Why've you come, Sasha?"
"You know, mistress, I clean forgot to lock my casket."
"Why, you little fool! Who's going to touch your casket? Run along and work in the field."

I say:
"I've worked for that soot four months, and now somebody'll steal it from me."
So I run into the house and lock the casket. Then I go back to the master and say:
"You know, master, I've got a bellyache today. Lemme go home."
You see, I fear that the mistress will break open my casket meanwhile.
Master says: "If you're sick, go lie down."
I rush back to the house and get there in less than five minutes; my casket is safe and sound.

Next day there's a fair in our place, Byten.
I ask the master to let me have horses to take the soot to the fair.
Master says: "Well, go ahead and sell your soot."
"Isn't he a fool? Whoever's going to buy soot from him?" say the boys. Well, I don't really mind what they say. I harness up two horses, ask master to help me carry out the casket with soot and put it on the cart, and off I go with my soot to the fair.

I went by a rather rough road and the priest rolled over from one side to the other in the casket. Only his teeth glistened white on his face. The rest of him was as black as soot.
So I come to the fair. There are ever so many masters there. I call out nice and loud:
"Who ever wants to have a look, may see the devil for five hundred zloties."

Well, you know of course that the masters have plenty of zloties about them, so, very soon, there is a regular queueing up to see the devil for five hundred zloties. In a little while they begin giving me a thousand for a look, and ask me to make it longer.

In about three hours I got so many coins I had nowhere to put them. So I opened the casket. The priest jumped out and began to run around the fair. All the women screeched:
"There he is, there he is, the devil!"

So I go back home and show my master and the boys the coins that I got for my soot. They gaped, and gaped, and were surprised, sure'nough:
"Whoever was such a fool to pay money for soot?"
Then they remembered my words:

"A time will come when you'll say: he isn't such a fool, after all!"
So I gave them coins all round, more than they could ever earn working for the master.
And the master says:

"See there you c'n work for me for money or for bread. But I'll collect the soot myself and I'll sell it."

I say: "I got enough money!"
And then I go away from him to my old folk's house.
Well, he was so anxious to sell soot, that he went to the fair two months later.
He went there, and stopped in the row where sausages and buns are sold. And he opened his casket there.

"What've you got there?"
"Soot to sell."
At that very moment a terrific gust of wind blows up his soot and carries it off into the faces of the people, onto the sausages and the buns.

Policemen come running up and arrest him. Till his wife finds him there, he stays in prison the whole week hungry and cold. There he has to pay for everything he spoils with his soot. And he hasn't enough money for that, for he'd spoilt a lot of good food. So he finds out that no fool c'n collect soot and sell it well, and he has to go as a boy to work for another master.

How Ivanka Freed the Muzhiks from the Cruel Landlord

Once upon a time there lived a most terribly cruel landlord. Nobody could stay in his service very long. He threw everybody out and, what's more, didn't pay them anything, for he was not only cruel but also greedy.

Now in one of the villages there lived a fine youngster. His name was Yanka. His family was very large, a lot of children there were, and Yanka the eldest, the father was old and a sick man, the mother also was a sick woman; there was very little land to work on. So Yanka decided to go to work for the cruel landlord and to avenge — if he could — the sufferings inflicted by the landlord on the people of his village. So Yanka goes to the landlord and asks him if he needs young men for work.

"Yes," says the landlord, "but there's one condition and you better know it beforehand. If you do anything wrong, or don't work as I say, I'll cut off your ears and won't pay you anything."

"All right," says Yanka, "agreed. Only you must hear my condition, too. I don't need your pay, I'll work well, only you, Master, mustn't get angry. If you do, I'll cut off your ears."

"All right," says the landlord, "let it be so."

And, sure enough, he agreed to this only because he was so very greedy. So Yanka began to work for the landlord. He worked so well, that the landlord couldn't praise him enough. Well, once the landlord sends Yanka to tend the swine; he had a very great many swine. So Yanka takes the swine to feed and begins thinking how to take his revenge on the landlord. Suddenly he sees a group of merchants coming along the road.

"Listen, merchants," says Yanka, "buy my swine; I'll give them cheap, only I'll want their tails back."

The merchants didn't show their surprise, although Yanka sold the swine very cheap. They paid him the money, gave him the tails and went their way. And Yanka stuck all the tails on the tussocks in the marsh and went home.

"Where are the swine?" asks the landlord.

"Right there," says Yanka, pointing to the marsh, "they got drowned in the marsh. You're not angry, are you, Master?"

Well, the landlord said, that it was too bad, but he wasn't angry, what was to be done about it, anyhow!

In the morning he sends Yanka to the fields and says:

"You'll work the land until the dog gets hungry and goes back home. My dog'll go with you."

So Yanka went to plough. He came to the field, sat down on the boundary line and began to think: what else could he do?

So he thought and thought, then got up and slaughtered the oxen, cut them up into pieces and threw the pieces about in the field. The dog ate its fill of the meat, but couldn't find water to drink; it was very thirsty, so it ran back home. Yanka went after it. The landlord saw him and asked:

"Why so early? Where are the oxen?"

"There are no oxen," says Yanka, "the wolves tore them. I came because the dog ran home. Why, Master, you aren't angry, are you?"

"No," says the landlord. "No, I'm not."

Now, the landlord begins to think how to get rid of Yanka. For if he goes on like that he'll ruin all his farm. He asks his wife what she thinks about it, and what should they do? So he decides to sell everything he has, to get the money and go away after nightfall, after setting fire to the house, so that Yanka burns with it. He and his wife do what he says. The landlord sends Yanka to work while he sells everything he has and puts the money in

a bag. Well, he puts the money in the bag, and they are ready to leave at nightfall, but Yanka guesses that something is wrong. He gets up very quietly, gets the bag and empties the coins into a hole in the yard; he covers the hole up and gets into the bag, and sits there, quiet as a mouse. In the middle of the night the landlord awakes and wakens the wife.

"Get up quick, and let's run. You set fire to the house and then catch up with me."

The landlord heaves the bag across his shoulder and starts at a good run, raising the dust as he goes.

They run and run till both he and his wife are quite out of breath. She asks him to rest a while and he answers:

"We'll pass the marsh, then we'll rest."

So they go across the marsh, the mud reaches up to their waists, they get past the devils' eyes, jump from tussock to tussock, but they're both happy to have got away from Yanka. And Yanka sits on the master's shoulder and laughs his head off. Well, the landlord hears his laughter and his heart misses several beats from fear and anger.

And Yanka says:

"But Master, where shall I go from you, when I still have a whole year to work for you. Maybe you are angry?"

"Why, no," says the landlord, "just you go and get some dry branches together. We'll have to dry ourselves some."

Yanka goes some steps away and stops behind a bush to listen to what the master and the mistress talk about. Well, they are considering how to get rid of Yanka. The landlord says:

"We'll lie down to sleep, and we'll put Yanka on the outside, and at midnight we'll push him over into the water, and everything will be over."

Yanka brought the dry branches, they made up a fire and dried themselves a bit, had some food and lay down to sleep. Yanka lay down near the water, then lay the landlord, then his wife. As soon as the two fell asleep Yanka changed places very quietly and lay down next to the landlord's wife. When she woke up after midnight, she pushed her husband straight into the water. Then she says:

"Get up, and let's run."

All of a sudden, she looks up and sees: it's Yanka who is getting up. The poor woman, from sheer terror, falls into the water after her husband. Yanka returns home, gets the money he'd buried, then goes off to his village. There was plenty of money. Yanka divides it between the poor villagers, together with what is still left of the landlord's belongings. All of them thank Yanka for everything he's done for them, for having delivered them from the cruel landlord, and they begin to live quietly and well, until another cruel landlord comes and sits on top of them!

Paleschuk and the Devil

People say — and it's probably true, wherever there are marshes, you are sure to find the devil. Of course, it's not only inside the marshes but wherever you look, that you'll see the evil spirits. Water used to swarm with little devils. During the festivity of the Blessing of the Waters, on Epiphany, as soon as the devils (big and small) are thrown out of the water by the holy blessing, they mill around and raise such a havoc around them that it's better to sit tight in one's hut and neither drink nor eat, nor risk going out, not even for anything. That is why there are usually such fierce snow storms around Epiphany. At times they are so fierce that everything is covered up with snow. It's bad then, for anyone who is outside, in the fields: he won't see a thing about him. If there are people abroad then, the evil sprites will turn them round and round about, make them go in circles and'll send them to their death right near their own village. In the past such weather would have no







*Say, Paleschuk goes to the forest,
to look for timber for his hut,
the devil
immediately begins
to drive him around and around,
to make him lose his way
perish in the forest.
But you see
Paleschuk walks about in the forest
and marks the trees he passes
with his pole-axe.
So the devil
drives him round
and round, until he himself doesn't know where he is,
but Paleschuk
finds himself
a fine tree,
barks some bast for shoes,
then goes back home,
guiding himself
by the trees
he's marked.
The devil sees
that the man hasn't lost his way.
So
he runs ahead of him,
then goes out
to meet him
and asks
why he's marked so many trees.
"Those are good trees
to build my hut with," says Paleschuk.
"Why so many? "
"I want to build up the whole of Palesiye."
"Well, "
thinks the devil,
"that's bad."
And he decides to use cunning,
to get him
to leave the place,
which he,
the devil,
considers to be his by right.
"Let me help you,"
he says,"
I haven't anything else to do now,
anyhow."
"All right," says Paleschuk,*

mercy on people. Now snow storms like that are rare, for there are less devils about, and the smaller evil sprites no longer come to worry people: the prophet Elija killed off many of them with thunder, and new ones are no longer born, either. Before, devils were very fertile, but Paleschuk outwitted the devil, you know, and he couldn't have little ones any more. This is how it came to pass:

Paleschuk went and chose himself a place in the marsh near the river and started fixing himself up a place to live in, there. First laid out a fire, caught himself some loach, cooked them, had a good feed and lay down to rest next to the fire. When the devil saw that Paleschuk feared neither the marsh, nor the river, nor the forest, he decided to frighten him so that he would leave the place he had chosen. And he started playing all sorts of mean, dirty tricks on him. Wheresoever Paleschuk went, the devil was there, ready and waiting for him, thinking up the nastiest tricks to play on him. Say, Paleschuk goes to the forest, to look for timber for his hut, the devil immediately begins to drive him around and around, to make him lose his way, perish in the forest. But you see Paleschuk walks about in the forest and marks the trees he passes with his pole-axe. So the devil drives him round and round, until he himself doesn't know where he is, but Paleschuk finds himself a fine tree, barks some bast for shoes, then goes back home, guiding himself by the trees he's marked. The devil sees that the man hasn't lost his way. So he runs ahead of him, then goes out to meet him and asks why he's marked so many trees.

"Those are good trees to build my hut with," says Paleschuk.

"Why so many?"

"I want to build up the whole of Palessiye."

"Well," thinks the devil, "that's bad." And he decides to use cunning, to get him to leave the place, which he, the devil, considers to be his by right.

"Let me help you," he says, "I haven't anything else to do now, anyhow."

"All right," says Paleschuk, "you help me and I'll thank you."

That's all the devil needs.

"I'll help," he thinks, "and I'll fix things so that I'll get a good hold on you."

So Paleschuk begins to clear the land, to prepare the timber for his hut. First he orders the devil to clear up the forest. Then the devil awaits for more work to be given him and Paleschuk tells him to pull out huge old oak trunks with roots and all, and go drown them in the marsh or in the lake. You can still see huge ditches and ravines where the devil got the tree trunks from. Well, the devil cleared a good piece of land and Paleschuk set him to build roads. So the devil pulled out a huge oak, with roots and all, seized it by its crown and pulled it through the forest. The roots ploughed up the ground; they pulled out all the small trees on the way and left only furrows and grooves behind. So the devil made such roads there that only he himself could use. Paleschuk saw this and began to swear at the devil with might and main:

"For what kind of devil, in the devil's name, have you made all those devilish furrows and grooves?"

But the devil is quite pleased that he's been able to do something unpleasant to the man. He's so pleased that he licks his whiskers and wags his tail, but only very slightly.

"All right," says Paleschuk, "let's have a ride together over your roads."

So he jumps astride the devil and off they go, over furrows and grooves. The devil runs along up to his armpits in water, up to his neck in mud, and Paleschuk sits astride him, just keeping his feet up as high as he can, just driving him like if he was a horse. So they run through the forest, along the devil's roads, until Paleschuk is satisfied and then they go back home.

"See," says the devil, "what good roads I've made".

"Well, they may be good, but I wish the devil may take them, with you into the bargain".

Well, you see it's from that time that Palessiye has such terrible roads, that only the devil can travel over them. Then Paleschuk began to clear the forest together with the

devil, and to carry timber to build his hut. Paleschuk built himself a good hut, ploughed a piece of land, cleared a field near the hut and went to live there with his wife and work on the land. The devil was quite pleased that the marshes and the bowels of the earth with its hidden wealth remained untouched. So he went there and sat in the marshes with his little evil sprites. Paleschuk, meanwhile, lived in his new home, raised some farm animals, reaped a good harvest, caught a lot of loach and was quite happy. But once, when he was threshing his grain on the threshing-floor the devil comes up to him and asks him what he's doing.

"I'm threshing grain", says Paleschuk.

"Let me thresh a bit".

So Paleschuk gives the chain to the devil and he starts threshing with such fury that the sheaves go flying all over the place, even under the sling.

"Why do the sheaves lie still when you thresh, and jump all over the place when I do it?" asks the devil.

"That's because I'm stronger: when I hit, the sheaf sticks right into the threshing-floor."

"Dear me! and where do you get such strength from?" The devil wants to know.

"Where! where! I've relieved myself of some weight!"

"Ah! I want to relieve myself of some weight too", says the devil.

"All right!" says Paleschuk, "only I must tie you up, for you'll run off and that'll spoil everything."

"Tie me up, then."

So Paleschuk gets a rope and ties the devil up to a large oaktree, then he takes up a sickle, and begins to "relieve him of some weight". The devil screams in a voice that doesn't seem at all like his own voice, while Paleschuk continues to saw at him with the sickle. Well, the devil stands it as long as he can, then of a sudden gives a mighty jerk and first pulls the oak out, with roots and all, then tears the rope as if it were a spider web. So that's how Paleschuk "relieved the devil of some weight"; then he said:

"Well, now, you'll be as strong as I am." The devil can't answer a word, but makes for the marshes. He can't even run, but crawls, crabwise.

Well, he sits a bit in the marsh, but it doesn't help: blood poures and poures, as from a slaughtered piglet. So back he crawls to Paleschuk. Paleschuk sees that the devil comes crawling practically on all fours and tells his wife to get some of his clothes on, and sends her to thresh grain. So the wife dresses up in man's clothes and goes to the threshing-floor to thresh. The devil crawls up but pain has practically blinded him, so he does not see that it is a woman threshing, not Paleschuk. And he complains bitterly that that wound won't heal, and why is it so?

"You don't want much, do you", says the woman, in a mannish voice "wouldn't it be fine to have that wound heal right off. I was relieved of some weight twenty years ago and the wound is still there..." So the poor devil crawls to his marsh with his tail between his legs. And from that time the devils have stopped having little ones. Then, of course, the prophet Elija beats them up each summer with his thunder. So there are fewer and fewer devils now in the marshes, while paleschuks multiply and crowd up in the Palessiye. Soon a day will come when all the devils will disappear; then the people will also get the marshes and the bowels of the earth, with all its riches.

The Muzhik and the Landlord

Once upon a time there lived a landlord, such a horrid, nasty one, that it was a real misfortune for anyone to have aught to do with him. Not a soul could satisfy him in any way. Everybody feared him worse than the very devil. If anyone came to him to ask for something (and that would only happen once in a blue moon) he'd up and cry out, as fierce as anything:

"Well, what've you to say for yourself? "

And the man would say:

"I only have to say that everything is just fine."

And he'd stand there, trembling so, you could hear his bones rattle.

"Fine, is it? " the landlord would growl. "Off to the stables with the loafer! "

And you know of course what that means. He was simply whipped there and then sent home.

That's what the landlord was like. He wouldn't allow a body to say a word. He just couldn't speak to people otherwise. And the people feared to say anything that would not be to his liking — he'd just have them whipped to death, would skin them alive, if a body would say something to him in a way he didn't like, something that would affect him against the grain so to say. There was, however, one ungainly muzhik whom people made fun of, calling him Stopka; as you know, that is what a small wine glass is called. Stopka could speak with the landlord, all right. Now, once that landlord won a very fine piece of property at cards. Somewhere in spring, near the feast of Saint Nicholas, he went off to visit that property of his, and remained there all summer. You see, it pleased him greatly. And, as the saying goes in our country, a new sieve will be put on the shelf, the old one — thrown under the bench.

The manager of the landowner's estate is upset that his master is away so long, for, as usual everything seems to go wrong, for it never rains but it pours you know! So the manager begins to think how to get word to his master. So he thinks and thinks, and finally it dawns on him that he should send him a messenger. Only, unfortunately, he does not know whom to send, who could tell the master about all the misfortunes that have occurred. Whomsoever he tries to send — refuses to go, for everybody is afraid of the master, afraid to be whipped to death for telling the truth. So the manager promises a good present to whomsoever would go to the master. He goes through all the village, apparently no volunteers are to be found. So he begins to wring his hands in despair — for he really doesn't know what to do. Stopka hears of all this and goes to the manager and says:

"I'll go to the master and I'll tell him all. I know how to talk to him."

The manager is as pleased as can be; he practically kisses Stopka for joy.

He gives Stopka a handful of copecks, he takes off his boots and makes Stopka put them on, and he sends him to the master's new property. Off goes our Stopka and never misses a single pot-house on his way. We don't know if it takes him long to get there, but he finally arrives at the new property. He goes through the yard up to the house and the master's flunkey meets him there.

"What are you loafing about here for, you good-for-nothing! " cries the flunkey when he sees Stopka; and then he sets the dogs at him.

Stopka gets a piece of lard out of his boot and throws it to the dogs. The dogs stop barking and Stopka, meanwhile, steps over the threshold into the house.

"What d'ye want? " asks a second flunkey.

"I want to speak to the big Master," says Stopka, "I've come from the big Master's old property, little master! "

"All right," says the flunkey, "I'll tell the master about you, only you'll tell me how come you know I'm a master, too? "

"I know, all right, that's why I say it. Maybe you aren't a real master, just something like one, maybe half a master, for you've a snub nose and a greasy forehead and one can see at once that you lick the master's plates for left-overs."

Well, naturally the flunkey yearns to catch hold of Stopka's knotted hair, and to drag him into the office and then, perhaps, to the court of justice, when he hears the Master calling him.

"Who is that there?" asks the Master.

"It's one of the serfs from your property. He's been sent to you," says the flunkey.

"Well, call him in, be quick about it." So the flunkey runs off to get Stopka. But Stopka has just got out his pouch, has put some tobacco into his pipe and is now striking out fire with his flint, then he begins to smoke his pipe; he smokes with relish, and spits all over the clean floor.

"Go on, the Master wants you," says the flunkey.

"No hurry, he can wait," says Stopka and continues smoking.

"Go on, quickly!"

"All right, all right! As soon as I finish my pipe." So the Master waits and waits for Stopka! He sends another flunkey for him. Stopka pays as much heed to him as he would to a fly. First he finishes smoking his pipe, then he empties the ash out of it, then he puts the pipe back in his pocket, and only then he makes his way to the presence of the landlord. The flunkey runs in front of him, like a servile dog, opening the doors into the inner rooms of the mansion. Well, so Stopka finally comes to the landlord's study and goes into a fit of coughing. He coughs a good while, then belches sonorously; meanwhile the landlord sits and twirls his moustache.

"A good day to you, Master!"

"What have you come with?"

"Only with fair news, Master!"

"Well, what are they like?"

"Well, Master, the manager sent me... you see, the Master's knife broke..."

"And how, may I ask, did it break?"

"Well Master, you know, as the saying goes, one can't even kill a louse without a knife. Well, you know, any kind of knife comes in handy at work. The Master's knife lay handy and when they started skinning the hound they took the knife... Well, you know the skin on the hound is very thick... So the knife got broke."

"What are you saying, you good-for-nothing? What hound?"

"The Master's hound, remember, it's the one that jumped into the well, and they sent Mikita to get him out, but Mikita got drowned in the well. It must be the hound the Master liked to take hunting. I reckon it's the hound the Master gave three muzhiks for to the neighbouring master."

"What are you prattling about? Is my hound dead?"

"Quite dead, Master."

"What did it die of?"

"Seems it was fine, but when it overate horse-flesh, it turned up its toes."

"What horse-flesh?"

"Why, the horse-flesh of the stallion, of course."

"What stallion?"

"Master's bay stallion with the bald spot, of course."

"You mean to say my stallion is dead?"

"Quite dead, Master. Too bad, it was a fine stallion."

"Oh! How miserable I am!"

"Eh, Master, you mustn't be unhappy. Everyone knows that if a foal is born with a bald spot, it'll die, or the wolves will get it."

"Well, tell me, how did it die?"

"Maybe it was overworked."

"What work was there for it to do? Maybe they rode it much?"

"Nah, Master, nobody rode on him: it was always in its stall."

"So what happened?"

"Well, it carried water."

"What ever did it carry water for?"

"Well master, people say that when a man is drowning, he'll grab an open razor to save himself. When the pig-sty began to burn the manager said to use the stallion for water."

"So the pig-sty burnt down?"

"Sure'nough, Master. All of it."

"How did it catch fire?"

"Well, Master, you know it was near the cow-shed."

"Then the cow-shed also burned?"

"Like it was a candle, Master."

"How did the cow-shed catch fire?"

"I don't rightly know, Master. Maybe from the cart-loads, or maybe from the mansion."

"Jesus Christ! So the mansion is also burnt down?"

"Yes, Master, the earth around it is all wet, but there's no more mansion."

"And everything in the yard is burnt down?"

"Everything, Master. Clean earth all around, fit to sow turnips on it."

The landlord grabbed at his hair, began shaking all over and moaning loudly and calling out to God.

"Why did the mansion burn?" he finally turned to Stopka again.

"It was the candle, Master."

"Why were candles lit?"

"Well, master, everyone lights candles when somebody dies, you know that."

"Who died, then?"

"May she rest in peace and sing with the angels, the Mistress died."

"What's that? What's that? What are you saying, you fool? The Mistress? Oh! unhappy man that I am."

And the landlord began to cry and wring his hands.

"Why does the Master cry? God hasn't forgotten to give the Master something in return for what he's taken."

"What? Speak quick!"

"Well, God gave Master a grandson. Master's eldest daughter had a son. A fine little fellow, I mean a fine little Master, the spitted image of Master's coachman Mikita."

On hearing this the landlord fell off the armchair while Stopka went off to the kitchen, to get a bite of something. So that's how our Stopka was the only one of us who was able to speak to the landlord.

How Ivan Frightened Away the Robbers and Got Rid of the Priest and the Deacon

Once upon a time there lived a man with his wife, in a village; a good couple they were. The man's name was Ivan, he was quite a bright fellow, but when, suddenly, he became very poor everybody began to call him Ivan the fool. They were neither young nor old, were Ivan and his wife — just about middle-aged.

So they lived, they toiled and they worried, and their sweat watered the soil, but they saw no benefit from their toil.

During a specially hungry year they sold their cow and their horse and went to live in a broken-down, poor old hut.

Once Ivan said to his wife:

"I think I'll go begging, rather than starve to death. Surely people will feel pity and throw me a mite of bread."

The wife thought so, too, and Ivan went into the wide world to beg good people for some bread.

But everybody was very poor that year; people barely had enough bread for themselves, and there were so many beggars about!

Ivan then decided to take a different road, to go to a different land. He had to cross a very dark forest to get there. He walked and walked, got very tired, wanted badly to stop and rest, but there was not a single living soul around — only wolves, howling hungrily and some queer bird crying out in an awe-inspiring voice.

Suddenly Ivan saw a hut right near the road. He was awfully glad to see a hut where he might find some people to speak to, so he entered the hut. There was nobody there, however, if we do not consider a huge tomcat, sitting right in front of the stove.

But you should have seen all there was in that hut!

For one thing, on the table there were things set out even tastier than what our landlord had.

So Ivan sat down at the table and began cleaning up all the plates around him — he was very hungry, for he hadn't eaten for several days.

So he ate his fill, took out his pipe and lit it, then he suddenly felt very sleepy. So he hid under the bed and dropped off into a troubled slumber.

Of course you know who lived in that hut. Seven brothers, seven robbers lived there. They come back home and what do you think they see? Why, that someone has been at their food, for there's very little left on the table, they also see some kind of a bag, lying near the threshold.

"Well, well," say the brother-robbers, "if anyone was here, surely more will come. Why worry? We're seven strong, aren't we?"

So the brother-robbers looked around the hut, behind the hut, the only place they never looked was under the bed. Then they sat down.

Meanwhile, Ivan was having a most terrible dream — he dreamed that he was catching the devil in the marsh. All of a sudden he yelled:

"Catch him! Hold him! There he goes!"

The brother-robbers got such a fright that they ran out of the hut and ran for their life.

But then, you know, they left everything they'd robbed behind. A little while later Ivan awakes, finishes eating up whatever he hadn't eaten before, and decides it is high time to be on his way. He hurries because he knows that if the owners of the hut come home and find him there, they'll surely make things unpleasant for him.

So he decides to leave right away and just bends down to pick up his bag, when he sees what looks like very small bundles, lying on the floor.

He pokes the bundles with his foot and feels there's something hard in them, something that makes a jingling sound. So he unties one of the small bundles, and — well, can you imagine? There's money inside, gold pieces, and all! So he fills his bag up to the very top with the little bundles and goes straight home, overjoyed, with his find.

Well, after that our Ivan collects all his senses about him and buys himself a very fine hut indeed; he also gets himself a cow and a horse and begins to live very happily again.

At that very time a very inquisitive priest lived in the village where Ivan bought his hut. He saw all this and said:

"Listen, Ivan, you're not in any way connected with robbers, are you? Look at the amount of goods you have."

From then on the priest begins to keep an eye on Ivan. One fine day Ivan has to go to town to buy one thing and another, for, as you well know, in a household everything tends to break, or gets torn, or has to be replaced for one reason or another by something new.

So he goes to town, and there he goes straight to a small store. He walks up to the counter, looks over the goods on the shelves and says to the shopkeeper:

"You know what, old man, I'll give you all this money I have with me and I'll pick the goods I need, until I get my money's worth! "

The fellow agrees to this, so Ivan lights up his pipe and begins pointing out:

"Some of this, and then, again, some of that."

He chooses such a pile of goods that surely there isn't a dog can jump over it! At that very moment the priest and the deacon walk right into the store.

Our Ivan packs up his goods, walks up to the shopkeeper, takes off his old hat, all dirty and torn, and bangs the counter twice with it, and says:

"All settled! All settled! " Meaning, of course, that he has already paid for everything.

The shopkeeper (he got the money beforehand, you remember), also bangs the counter with his fist and cries out:

"All settled! All settled! "

The priest and the deacon look at this with bulging eyes:

"Why don't you pay up what you owe, Ivanka? " asks the priest.

Meanwhile the shopkeeper is busy selling goods to another buyer, so he does not hear the question. Ivan says:

"My hat pays for me, reverend father, it fixes up all my debts".

"Sell me your hat, Ivanka, do! " says the priest.

"Why, reverend father, all I have I got with the help of my old hat. Surely you don't need it. You've just as much and even more without its help."

The priest begs and begs so hard, it seems impossible to refuse him. Ivan minces around, humms and hawes a bit, but finally agrees and asks the priest for 500 roubles. The priest is awfully pleased and runs straight off with the deacon to count out the necessary coins from his pouch. So Ivan takes the money and the goods he's bought at the store and off he goes home. Meanwhile, the priest walks about the store with his "paying" hat and chooses all sorts of goods.

After he and the deacon finish choosing there's hardly anything left on the counter and the shelves of the store.

The shopkeeper looks on all the time, and finally says:

"Pay up, reverend father! "

"All right, I'll pay right away," says the priest.

He takes out the "paying" hat and ... bang ... bang ... he hits the counter with it, adding:

"All settled! All settled! "

The shopkeeper is so surprised, his eyes begin to pop.

The priest looks and looks — nothing seems to happen, so he gets frightfully angry and bangs the counter with all his might, and shrieks at the top of his voice:

"All settled! all settled! "

"Quite crazy," thinks the shopkeeper and calls the police. The priest refuses to be pushed about at first, but then the police tie him up together with the deacon and push them both out of the store. Then the priest rushes straight off to Ivan.

Well, as you know, Ivan was no fool. He expected the visit. So he lay down on the bench, covered himself with a white sheet and kept quite still — as if he were dead. He told his wife to put a stick next to the door.

So there he lies and his wife wails over him, crying out:

"Oh, dear God! how am I to live now! Oh, my sainted father; oh, my blessed mother! "

Here is where the priest and the deacon rush into the house. The priest is so furious that his eyes are well nigh popping out of their sockets — he looks like the very devil himself, and then he shrieks:

"Where is that scoundrel? "

The wife wails:

"He is dead, reverend father; he lay there all day without moving and now he's dead,"

Well, the priest is so terribly angry that he grabs the stick that stands near the door, runs up to Ivan, who is covered up with a sheet — head and all — crosses himself and starts thrashing the body under the sheet with all his might. All of a sudden Ivan opens his eyes, as if awakening from a long sleep, looks around, and says:

"Thank you, reverend father, thank you for wakening me up with the life-giving rod; I'd've slept till doomsday if you hadn't come. Give me that rod. I'll start working miracles with it."

Well, of course the priest immediately forgets about the "paying" hat and looks yearningly at the life-giving rod, and starts to beg Ivan to sell the rod to him.

So Ivan says:

"Well, reverend father, you've brought me back to life, so I think you c'n have the rod for a 1000 roubles."

The priest and the deacon get the 1000 roubles, take the life-giving rod and rush off to get ready for a long journey.

The journey, you know, is to lead them to a certain kingdom, where a certain king's daughter, a lovely young girl, has just died. And the king has declared:

"If anybody will bring my daughter back to life, I'll give him half of my kingdom."

So, quite naturally, the priest decides to get half of the king's kingdom and — at the same time — to earn great fame for his deed bringing the young princess back to life.

So they start on their journey, with the deacon, and finally reach the sorrow-stricken king, who is so very happy to see them that he dances on the tips of his toes round the priest for joy.

He takes the two travellers to some special rooms, brings the dead body of his lovely daughter and leaves them alone with it.

As soon as they are alone the priest snatches the life-giving rod from under his garments and begins to thrash the body of the king's daughter with it. But the princess does not rise. So he gives the rod to the deacon, who also thrashes the body long and hard, and still she doesn't rise.

So the priest snatches the rod again from the deacon and beats the dead girl's head so hard that her brains drop out. Still, she doesn't rise.

Well, the priest understands now that he's been made a fool of once again, and runs off with the deacon, for the king — if ever he catches them, will make short work of having their heads chopped off!

And, of course, Ivan understands pretty well that this time, when the priest discovers he's been fooled, he won't fare well with the two of them, so he decides that he must get them out of the way.

So he says to his wife:

"As soon as the priest and the deacon come, you tell them that I'm making bast sandals. Meanwhile, I'll think of something."

Now, the priest comes running in and shrieking at the very top of his voice:

"Where's that dirty scoundrel? "

The wife is frightened by his appearance, for he looks like a madman; she says:

"He's right there, making bast sandals".

The priest grabs the first thing he finds near him, which happens to be an axe, and rushes to find Ivan. Well, our Ivan just hits him over the head with a crow-bar.

The deacon goes in after the priest, and Ivan meets him in the same way.

All of this takes place during the church festivity of the twelfth-day, or the Epiphany, when the frost in our country is especially strong. Well, that day it was so fierce, that a person's ears seemed to crackle.







*So the brother-robbers
looked around the hut,
behind the hut,
the only place they never looked
was under the bed.
Then they sat down.
Meanwhile,
Ivan was having a most terrible dream —
he dreamed that he was catching the devil
in the marsh.
All of a sudden he yelled:
"Catch him!
Hold him!
There he goes! "* .
*The brother-robbers got such a fright
that they ran out of the hut
and ran for their life.
But then,
you know,
they left everything they'd robbed behind.
A little while later
Ivan awakes,
finishes eating up
whatever he hadn't eaten before,
and decides
it is high time to be on his way.
He hurries
because he knows
that if the owners of the hut come home
and find him there,
they'll surely
make things unpleasant for him.
So he decides
to leave right away
and just bends down to pick up his bag,
when he sees
what looks like very small bundles,
lying on the floor.
He pokes the bundles with his foot
and feels
there's something hard in them,
that makes a jingling sound.
So he unties .
one of the small bundles,
and — well,
can you imagine?
There's money inside,
gold pieces, and all!*

That very day a military unit comes to the village, on its way elsewhere, and one of the soldiers comes to Ivan's hut, and asks him to allow him to spend the night there.

"All right," says Ivan, "I don't mind if you do; only I warn you — you won't get much sleep. There are devils in my hut and they run about, they bang at the partition and they simply don't let you sleep."

Well, the soldier says to Ivan:

"You pay me ten copecks and I warrant that not a single devil will be left to bother you!"

Our Ivan is right happy with this answer. As soon as it becomes dark he puts the priest — who has frozen into what seems a chunk of wood — behind the partition.

Then he ties a piece of string to the priest's fist and climbs up onto the Russian stove, holding the other end of the string in his hand.

The soldier barely dozes off, when Ivan pulls and pulls at the string: with each pull, the priest's hard frozen fist strikes at the partition. The soldier jumps up and runs to the partition.

He gets hold of the priest and Ivan says:

"Take him to the church — there's a lake behind it, with an ice-hole, where the water was sanctified for the festivity of the Epiphany."

So the soldier drags the devil (or so he thinks) to the lake and drowns him there.

Then they lie down again and our Ivan begins pulling the deacon's hand; the dead deacon thumps at the partition: toc, toc, thump, thump.

The soldier who'd just dropped off to sleep is quite annoyed this time. So he jumps up, dashes to the partition, grabs the deacon and lugs him off to the ice-hole.

Well, the sexton sees all this and runs to the archdeacon who is in the village that night, quite by chance, and is getting ready to go to bed in the priest's old house.

"I just saw a soldier. He went running past me, carrying the priest in his arms."

So the archdeacon rushes out after the soldier, just as he stands, in his underclothes. As he runs, he shouts:

"Who goes there?"

"A soldier."

"Whom are you carrying?"

"The devil."

"Where are you taking him?"

"To drown him."

So the soldier drowned the deacon and turned to run after the archdeacon, who — by the way — also looked like the very devil, what with his long hair let down and flying about, his eyes bulging with fear, and all white in his underclothes.

The soldier runs and runs after the archdeacon, and only manages to catch him because he slips on the ice, as he is rather clumsy.

So the soldier grabs him and drags him to the ice-hole. The archdeacon screams, and screams, and screams, but the soldier pushes him into the ice-hole and under the ice, until he sees the bubbles rise. Very pleased with himself the soldier goes to Ivan's hut and says:

"You know what? I drowned two devils and a third ran after me, probably wanted to catch me. So I ran after him, and caught him. He was heavy, sure enough; probably he was the devil's father?"

Well, our Ivan paid the soldier ten copecks for his work, and the soldier was awfully pleased, and lay down to sleep, for he felt quite tired.

And there you are! Now you know what our Ivan was like, and all about the soldier who spent the night in his hut. The soldier earned himself 10 copecks, and Ivan lived wisely and well, on the priest's money ever after!

Truth and Falsehood

Well, now we'll begin our story. Perhaps it's not a story, as such, but merely an introduction to one. The story'll come tomorrow after we've had a good dinner.

Once upon a time there lived two young men: one was called Falsehood, the other — Truth. They went about, begging. Truth would ask for bread, and Falsehood would steal it. Truth never had bread about him, while Falsehood's bag was always full. One day they began to argue as to how it was best to live.

Falsehood said:

"Better live with falsehood! "

While Truth said:

"No! Better live with truth! "

"Well, let's walk along the road, and whomsoever we meet, we'll ask how it's best to live: with falsehood or with truth? "

So they walked along and of a sudden they saw an old man shepherding sheep.

"Let's ask him! " they said.

So they went up to the old man and addressed him:

"How do you do, old man? We want you to tell us which is the best way to live: with truth or with falsehood? "

The old man thought and thought for a while, then looked at the sky and said:

"Falsehood is best nowadays. One can't live long with truth. If you live with falsehood you can always steal something: maybe some wood from the landlord's forest, maybe some bread; they have more, you know. And what'll you get if you live with truth? "

Truth says to this:

"You're not telling the truth, old man! Truth is better to live with! Let's go on, Falsehood! "

So they walked on and on and met some merchants on the road.

"Let's ask the merchants! "

"Greetings, merchants! "

"Greetings, young fellows! "

"Tell us how it's best to live: with truth or with falsehood? "

"That's easy to answer. Of course it is better to live with falsehood! That's how we live: if we don't fool anybody we'll never have anything! "

So Falsehood said to Truth:

"Didn't I tell you that it was better to live with falsehood? "

They went along the road and Truth got hungry. He asked his companion:

"Give me a mite of bread, brother Falsehood! "

Falsehood answered:

"I'll give you some bread if you let me put your eye out! "

"All right, if you haven't the fear of God in you, let it be so! "

So Falsehood put Truth's eye out and gave him a piece of bread. He ate it and they went on. Truth felt hungry again.

"Brother, give me another piece of bread! "

Falsehood said:

"If you let me put your other eye out! "

Truth allowed him to do it and ate the bread Falsehood gave him. Then Falsehood said:

"So, am I supposed to be blind man's guide now? "

He turned around and went off, leaving blind Truth alone.

Truth went on walking, feeling his way about, and finally came to a forest. He went into the forest and heard suddenly somebody speaking to him:

"Walk straight along this path, you'll come up to a brook; wash your eyes with that water, and you'll see again. Next to the brook you'll see a great big oak. Climb up that oak and spend the night there. Some serpents will fly up to the oak at night. Mind you listen to everything they say."

He did as he was told. The serpents flew up to the oak as soon as night fell. One of them said:

"I went here, there, and everywhere."

Another said:

"I went somewhere else."

A third said:

"I went to the king's daughter; I've been torturing her for so many years, no one can help her. If someone, likely to help her, came along, he'd get the image of the Mother of God from the gates of a merchant; then he'd put it into water and give the water to the girl to drink. I wouldn't ever go there any more, and she'd get well in an hour's time! "

When day dawned and the serpents flew away, each one on its own dirty business, Truth climbed down from the oak and went to the merchant the serpent was speaking about.

"Good day, merchant! "

"Greetings, Truth! What brings you here? "

"Won't you, please, give me that there image of the Mother of God? "

"I'll give it to you, if you work for me for a year! "

Truth remained with the merchant for a year. When the year elapsed the merchant gave him the money but wouldn't give him the image: he said he'd have to work for another year, for Truth was a fine carpenter: he made beautiful chairs and tables and other things. Well, he said, he wouldn't take the money, the merchant said he wouldn't give him the image. Truth saw no way out, but to work for another year, at the end of which he got the image and went to see the king. The king's servants wouldn't let him in, so he said:

"Tell the king that I've come to cure his daughter."

The servants went and told the king and he ran out to Truth, brought him into the palace, gave him food and drink and told him to rest a couple of hours. Truth slept, got up quite refreshed and went to see the girl. He put the image into some water, then gave the water to the girl to drink and even sprinkled some of it on her, and she felt quite well again. When the king came, he asked:

"Well, have you cured her? "

The girl herself answered to her father's question:

"I'm quite well! "

"Well," said the king, "are you married, or are you a bachelor? "

"I'm a bachelor! "

"Fine then, I'll marry you to my daughter."

So Truth married the young girl and there was much rejoicing, everybody ate and drank their fill. Truth lived for two years in the palace, then said:

"I'm going to visit my village, Father."

The king said all right, he may go, so he got ready to leave, but his wife said she also wanted to go with him. So he took his wife along, and went to his village.

On the way they met Falsehood. Truth recognized him immediately, but Falsehood did not recognize Truth.

"Greetings, Falsehood! "

"Greetings, your highness, only I don't know who you are? "

"You haven't forgotten Truth, whose eyes you put out, have you? "

"Oh! dear, now I see who you are! "

Falsehood fell on his knees in the middle of the road and begged:

"Forgive me, for what I did to you! "

"Don't fear, I won't do anything; I'll tell you what to do. Go into this forest and find 149

a path that will lead you to a brook. Wash your eyes in that brook and you'll see a big oak, standing nearby. Climb up to the top of it and spend the night there..."

Falsehood did as he was told; the serpents came flying in and made themselves comfortable for the night under the oak. One of them said:

"I went here, there, and everywhere."

The other said:

"I went somewhere else! "

The third said:

"You remember what I told you about last time? Well, he heard us and did everything I told you here and I couldn't go there any more. Maybe there's someone on the oak, listening to us now, to what we are speaking about? "

The serpent decided to make sure and climbed up the oak.

"Well, well, old man; so it's you who listens to everything we talk about, is it?"

The serpent got hold of Falsehood by the nape of the neck and pushed him off the oak. He fell on the ground and broke up into seven hundred pieces. Now there are seven hundred pubs around the place, where people go and get drunk!

How a Poor Muzhik Looked for Truth and Found It

Once upon a time there lived a poor, landless peasant, a healthy, toiling fellow, always ready for any kind of work. The tough palms of his hands were covered with hard, dry corns, that never, never came off.

However much he toiled and laboured he could never get out of his hungry, needy life. His dilapidated hut was practically collapsing; his wife tried ever so hard to manage without a cow, but his children cried of hunger all day long; not much was left for him but to put his head into a noose or to dive headlong into an ice-hole in the river. No way out and, what's more, none to be seen in the future. That's the everlasting destiny of the muzhik — toiling all his life for somebody else, getting his hands covered with corns and never being able to eat his fill.

A day came, when our muzhik pulled his belt a bit tighter round his belly, and went to look for truth, to find out how working people should live in this world without suffering, need, and hunger. So he went to the tzar and asked him to put order and bring truth into the life of the people, so that everybody might work and live well. The tzar just glanced at him and sent him to the army; there he became a soldier, and later on he was sent to the war. Our muzhik spent several years among soldiers, went to war, was wounded several times and came back home, where he found his family in still worse conditions of need and starvation. He scratched his head and thought: "So this is the tzar's truth, is it? this is his order?" and went to the landlord to seek order. He took off his hat and asked the landlord to give him some work, to enable him to feed himself and his family. The landlord glanced at the muzhik with a mocking smile and hired him to work on his property, his estate. The muzhik worked as a hired hand for a year or more on his property, then went to the landlord for his pay. The landlord sent the muzhik to the stables and ordered his servants to give the man one hundred lashes, and then to throw him out from his property. When the muzhik came home he found still more misery and sorrow there. He scratched his head once more and thought: "So this is the master's truth, is it? "

Then the muzhik went to look for truth at the house of a kulak (you know what that is, a rich peasant who exploits the poor muzhik) and begged him to give him some work to feed himself and his family. The kulak looked at the poor muzhik absently and gave him some work. He said he'd pay him every three months. The poor muzhik worked for over three months, then went to ask the kulak for his pay. Instead of giving him the money he owed him the kulak made a rude gesture and then threw him out of his yard. The poor

muzhik came home, looked at his hungry children and thought: "So that's the kind of truth the rotten flayer of a kulak holds to".

Then the muzhik went to look for truth at the priest's house. He asked him to help a poor man to get rid of need and hunger. The priest looked kindly at the muzhik and told him to order a public prayer in church, to ask God to help him to achieve a better life. He also told the muzhik that in payment for this church service he should labour six days on his (the priest's) land. Willy-nilly the muzhik agreed to order a public prayer in church and pay for it with six days labour on the priest's property. But the poor man's life became worse and worse — the public prayer didn't seem to work at all. The muzhik scratched his head and thought: "So that's what the priest's truth and prayers are like".

So the poor muzhik went to look for truth along different roads and in other directions. He walked a lot about the world, he met different people but he never found where the truth was. At last he met an honest looking man on his way, who began to ask the poor muzhik where he'd been and what he was looking for. The muzhik told this man all about himself, about his going to look for truth at the tzar's, and the landlord's, at the kulak's and the priest's, but except sneers and mockery a muzhik could find nothing anywhere. The man listened to him, then said:

"You're a strong, hardworking man, but you go looking for truth where there is none, and none can be found. If you want to find truth and a better life for yourself and yours, go with the workers and together with them beat up your tzars, your landlords, your kulaks and your priests. That's the only way you peasants, together with the workers will get to the truth and to a better life for all those who work."

The muzhik cheered up a bit and thought: "So that's where our real truth lies, that's the road we must take to get to the truth and to a better life for all the working people".

So the poor muzhik went to the worker and the two together pulled the tzar off his throne, drove away landlords and kulaks, capitalists, officials and priests; then they set up their own, Soviet power, and now they are building communism in their country, where life has become beautiful, where all the working people live joyfully — together.

BYELORUSSIAN FOLK TALES

Translated by L. C o r t e s

Drawings by V. S l a w u k

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